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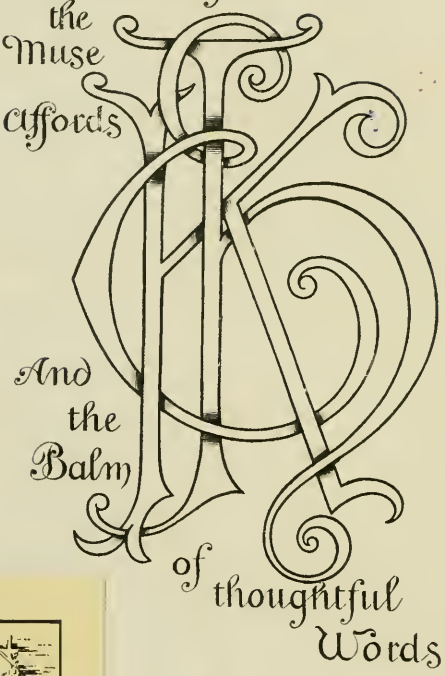

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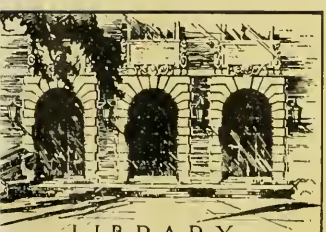

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MARCELLA

VOL. II.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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MARCELLA

BY

MRS HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR OF
'ROBERT ELSMERE,' 'THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1894

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CHAPTER V

Before she went home, Marcella turned into the little rectory garden to see if she could find Mary Harden for a minute or two. The intimacy between them was such that she generally found entrance to the house by going round to a garden door and knocking or calling. The house was very small, and Mary's little sitting-room was close to this door.

Her knock brought Mary instantly.

'Oh! come in. You won't mind. We were just at dinner. Charles is going away directly. Do stay and talk to me a bit.'

Marcella hesitated, but at last went in. The meals at the rectory distressed her—the brother and sister showed the marks of them. To-day she found their usual fare carefully and prettily arranged on a spotless table; some bread, cheese, and boiled rice—nothing else. Nor did they allow themselves any fire for meals. Marcella, sitting beside them in her fur, did not feel the cold, but Mary was clearly shivering under her shawl. They ate meat twice a week, and in the afternoon Mary lit the sitting-room fire. In the morning

she contented herself with the kitchen, where, as she cooked for many sick folk, and had only a girl of fourteen whom she was training to help her with the house work, she had generally much to do.

The Rector did not stay long after her arrival. He had a distant visit to pay to a dying child, and hurried off so as to be home, if possible, before dark. Marcella admired him, but did not feel that she understood him more as they were better acquainted. He was slight and young, and not very clever; but a certain inexpugnable dignity surrounded him, which, real as it was, sometimes irritated Marcella. It sat oddly on his round face—boyish still, in spite of its pinched and anxious look—but there it was, not to be ignored. Marcella thought him a Conservative, and very backward and ignorant in his political and social opinions. But she was perfectly conscious that she must also think him a saint; and that the deepest things in him were probably not for her.

Mr. Harden said a few words to her now as to her straw-plaiting scheme, which had his warmest sympathy—Marcella contrasted his tone gratefully with that of Wharton, and once more fell happily in love with her own ideas—then he went off, leaving the two girls together.

'Have you seen Mrs. Hurd this morning?' said Mary.

'Yes, Willie seems very bad.'

Mary assented.

'The doctor says he will hardly get through the winter, especially if this weather goes on. But the greatest excitement of the village just now—do you know?—is the quarrel between Hurd and Westall. Somebody told Charles yesterday that they never meet without threatening each other. Since the covers at Tudley End were raided, Westall seems to have quite lost his head. He declares Hurd knew all about that, and that he is hand and glove with the same gang still. He vows he will catch him out, and Hurd told the man who told Charles that if Westall bullies him any more he will put a knife into him. And Charles says that Hurd is not a bit like he was. He used to be such a patient, silent creature. Now——'

'He has woke up to a few more ideas and a little more life than he had, that's all,' said Marcella impatiently. 'He poached last winter, and small blame to him. But since he got work at the Court in November—is it likely? He knows that he was suspected; and what could be his interest now, after a hard day's work, to go out again at night, and run the risk of falling into Westall's clutches, when he doesn't want either the food or the money?'

'I don't know,' said Mary, shaking her head. 'Charles says, if they once do it, they hardly ever leave it off altogether. It's the excitement and amusement of it.'

'He promised me,' said Marcella proudly.

'They promise Charles all sorts of things, said Mary slyly; 'but they don't keep to them.'

Warmly grateful as both she and the Rector had been from the beginning to Marcella for the passionate interest she took in the place and the people, the sister was sometimes now a trifle jealous—divinely jealous—for her brother. Marcella's unbounded confidence in her own power and right over Mellor, her growing tendency to ignore anybody else's right or power, sometimes set Mary aflame, for Charles's sake, heartily and humbly as she admired her beautiful friend.

'I shall speak to Mr. Raeburn about it,' said Marcella.

She never called him 'Aldous' to anybody—a stiffness which jarred a little upon the gentle, sentimental Mary.

'I saw you pass,' she said, 'from one of the top windows. He was with you, wasn't he?'

A slight colour sprang to her sallow cheek, a light to her eyes. Most wonderful, most interesting was this engagement to Mary, who—strange to think!—had almost brought it about. Mr. Raeburn was to her one of the best and noblest of men, and she felt quite simply, and with a sort of Christian trembling for him, the romance of his great position. Was Marcella happy, was she proud of him, as she ought to be? Mary was often puzzled by her.

'Oh no!' said Marcella, with a little laugh. 'That wasn't Mr. Raeburn. I don't know where your eyes

were, Mary. That was Mr. Wharton, who is staying with us. He has gone on to a meeting at Widrington.'

Mary's face fell.

'Charles says Mr. Wharton's influence in the village is very bad,' she said quickly. 'He makes everybody discontented; sets everybody by the ears; and, after all, what can he do for anybody?'

'But that's just what he wants to do—to make them discontented,' cried Marcella. 'Then, if they vote for him, that's the first practical step towards improving their life.'

'But it won't give them more wages or keep them out of the public house,' said Mary, bewildered. She came of a homely middle-class stock, accustomed to a small range of thinking, and a high standard of doing. Marcella's political opinions were an amazement, and on the whole a scandal to her. She preferred generally to give them a wide berth.

Marcella did not reply. It was not worth while to talk to Mary on these topics. But Mary stuck to the subject a moment longer.

'You can't want him to get in, though?' she said in a puzzled voice, as she led the way to the little sitting-room across the passage, and took her work-basket out of the cupboard. 'It was only the week before last Mr. Raeburn was speaking at the schoolroom for Mr. Dodgson. You weren't there, Marcella?'

'No,' said Marcella, shortly. 'I thought you knew perfectly well, Mary, that Mr. Raeburn and I don't

agree politically. Certainly, I hope Mr. Wharton will get in!'

Mary opened her eyes in wonderment. She stared at Marcella, forgetting the sock she had just slipped over her left hand, and the darning needle in her right.

Marcella laughed.

'I know you think that two people who are going to be married ought to say ditto to each other in everything. Don't you—you dear old goose?'

She came and stood beside Mary, a stately and beautiful creature in her loosened furs. She stroked Mary's straight sandy hair back from her forehead. Mary looked up at her with a thrill, nay, a passionate throb of envy—soon suppressed.

'I think,' she said steadily, 'it is very strange—that love should oppose and disagree with what it loves.'

Marcella went restlessly towards the fire and began to examine the things on the mantelpiece.

'Can't people agree to differ, you sentimentalist? Can't they respect each other, without echoing each other on every subject?'

'Respect!' cried Mary, with a sudden scorn, which was startling from a creature so soft.

'There, she could tear me in pieces!' said Marcella, laughing, though her lip was not steady. 'I wonder what you would be like, Mary, if you were engaged.'

Mary ran her needle in and out with lightning speed

for a second or two, then she said almost under her breath—

'I shouldn't be engaged unless I were in love. And if I were in love, why, I would go anywhere—do anything—believe anything—if *he* told me!'

'Believe anything?—Mary—you wouldn't!'

'I don't mean as to religion,' said Mary, hastily. 'But everything else—I would give it all up!—governing one's self, thinking for one's self. He should do it, and I would *bless* him!'

She looked up crimson, drawing a very long breath, as though from some deep centre of painful, passionate feeling. It was Marcella's turn to stare. Never had Mary so revealed herself before.

'Did you ever love anyone like that, Mary?' she asked, quickly.

Mary dropped her head again over her work and did not answer immediately.

'Do you see—' she said at last, with a change of tone. 'Do you see that we have got our invitation?'

Marcella, about to give the rein to an eager curiosity Mary's manner had excited in her, felt herself pulled up sharply. When she chose, this little meek creature could put on the same unapproachableness as her brother. Marcella submitted.

'Yes, I see,' she said, taking up a card on the mantelpiece. 'It will be a great crush. I suppose you know. They have asked the whole county, it seems to me.'

The card bore an invitation in Miss Raeburn's name for the Rector and his sister to a dance at Maxwell Court—the date given was the twenty-fifth of January.

'What fun!' said Mary, her eye sparkling. 'You needn't suppose that I know enough of balls to be particular. I have only been to one before in my life—ever. That was at Cheltenham. An aunt took me—I didn't dance. There were hardly any men, but I enjoyed it.'

'Well, you shall dance this time,' said Marcella, 'for I will make Mr. Raeburn introduce you.'

'Nonsense, you won't have any time to think about me. You will be the queen—everybody will want to speak to you. I shall sit in a corner and look at you—that will be enough for me.'

Marcella went up to her quickly and kissed her, then she said, still holding her—

'I know you think I ought to be very happy, Mary!'

'I should think I do!' said Mary, with astonished emphasis, when the voice paused—'I should think I do!'

'I *am* happy—and I want to make him happy. But there are so many things, so many different aims and motives, that complicate life, that puzzle one. One doesn't know how much to give of one's self, to each——'

She stood with her hand on Mary's shoulder, looking away towards the window and the snowy garden, her brow frowning and distressed.

'Well, I don't understand,' said Mary, after a pause. 'As I said before, it seems to me so plain and easy—to be in love, and give one's self *all*—to that. But you are so much cleverer than I, Marcella, you know so much more. That makes the difference. I can't be like you. Perhaps I don't want to be!'—and she laughed. 'But I can admire you and love you, and think about you. There! Now, tell me what you are going to wear?'

'White satin, and Mr. Raeburn wants me to wear some pearls he is going to give me, some old pearls of his mother's. I believe I shall find them at Mellor when I get back.'

There was little girlish pleasure in the tone. It was as though Marcella thought her friend would be more interested in her bit of news than she was herself, and was handing it on to her to please her.

'Isn't there a superstition against doing that—before you're married?' said Mary doubtfully.

'As if I should mind if there was! But I don't believe there is, or Miss Raeburn would have heard of it. She's a mass of such things. Well! I hope I shall behave myself to please her at this function. There are not many things I do to her satisfaction; it's a mercy we're not going to live with her. Lord Maxwell is a dear; but she and I would never get on. Every way of thinking she has, rubs me up the wrong way; and as for her view of me, I am just a tare sown among her wheat. Perhaps she is right enough!'

Marcella leant her cheek pensively on one hand,

and with the other played with the things on the mantelpiece.

Mary looked at her, and then half smiled, half sighed.

'I think it is a very good thing you are to be married soon,' she said, with her little air of wisdom, which offended nobody. 'Then you'll know your own mind. When is it to be?'

'The end of February—after the election.'

'Two months,' mused Mary.

'Time enough to throw it all up in, you think?' said Marcella, recklessly, putting on her gloves for departure. 'Perhaps you'll be pleased to hear that I *am* going to a meeting of Mr. Raeburn's next week?'

'I *am* glad. You ought to go to them all.'

'Really, Mary! How am I to lift you out of this squaw theory of matrimony? Allow me to inform you that the following evening I am going to one of Mr. Wharton's—here in the schoolroom!'

She enjoyed her friend's disapproval.

'By yourself, Marcella? It isn't seemly!'

'I shall take a maid. Mr. Wharton is going to tell us how the people can—get the land, and how, when they have got it, all the money that used to go in rent will go in taking off taxes and making life comfortable for the poor.' She looked at Mary with a teasing smile.

'Oh! I dare say he will make his stealing sound very pretty,' said Mary, with unwonted scorn, as she opened the front door for her friend.

Marcella flashed out.

'I know you are a saint, Mary,' she said, turning back on the path outside to deliver her last shaft. 'I am often not so sure whether you are a Christian!'

Then she hurried off without another word, leaving the flushed and shaken Mary to ponder this strange dictum.

Marcella was just turning into the straight drive which led past the church on the left to Mellor House, when she heard footsteps behind her, and, looking round, she saw Edward Hallin.

'Will you give me some lunch, Miss Boyce, in return for a message? I am here instead of Aldous, who is very sorry for himself, and will be over later. I am to tell you that he went down to the station to meet a certain box. The box did not come, but will come this afternoon; so he waits for it, and will bring it over.'

Marcella flushed, smiled, and said she understood. Hallin moved on beside her, evidently glad of the opportunity of a talk with her.

'We are all going together to the Gairsley meeting next week, aren't we? I am so glad you are coming. Aldous will do his best.'

There was something very winning in his tone to her. It implied both his old and peculiar friendship for Aldous, and his eager wish to find a new friend in her—to adopt her into their comradeship. Something

very winning, too, in his whole personality—in the loosely knit, nervous figure, the irregular charm of feature, the benignant eyes and brow—even in the suggestions of physical delicacy, cheerfully concealed, yet none the less evident. The whole balance of Marcella's temper changed in some sort as she talked to him. She found herself wanting to please, instead of wanting to conquer, to make an effect.

'You have just come from the village, I think?' said Hallin. 'Aldous tells me you take a great interest in the people?'

He looked at her kindly, the look of one who saw all his fellow-creatures nobly, as it were, and to their best advantage.

'One may take an interest,' she said, in a dissatisfied voice, poking at the snow crystals on the road before her with the thorn-stick she carried, 'but one can do so little. And I don't know anything; not even what I want myself.'

'No; one can do next to nothing. And systems and theories don't matter, or, at least, very little. Yet, when you and Aldous are together, there will be more chance of *doing*, for you than for most. You will be two happy and powerful people! His power will be doubled by happiness; I have always known that.'

Marcella was seized with shyness, looked away, and did not know what to answer. At last she said abruptly—her head still turned to the woods on her left—

Are you sure he is going to be happy?'

'Shall I produce his letter to me?' he said, bantering—'or letters? For I knew a great deal about you before the 5th of October' (their engagement-day), 'and suspected what was going to happen long before Aldous did. No; after all, no! Those letters are my last bit of the old friendship. But the new began that same day,' he hastened to add, smiling: 'It may be richer than the old; I don't know. It depends on you.'

'I don't think—I am a very satisfactory friend,' said Marcella, still awkward, and speaking with difficulty.

'Well, let me find out, won't you? I don't think Aldous would call me exacting. I believe he would give me a decent character, though I tease him a good deal. You must let me tell you some time what he did for me—what he was to me—at Cambridge? I shall always feel sorry for Aldous's wife that she did not know him at college.'

A shock went through Marcella at the word—that tremendous word—wife. As Hallin said it, there was something intolerable in the claim it made!

'I should like you to tell me,' she said, faintly. Then she added, with more energy and a sudden advance of friendliness, 'But you really must come in and rest. Aldous told me he thought the walk from the Court was too much for you. Shall we take this short way?'

And she opened a little gate leading to a door at the side of the house through the Cedar Garden. The

narrow path only admitted of single file, and Hallin followed her, admiring her tall youth and the fine black and white of her head and cheek as she turned every now and then to speak to him. He realised more vividly than before the rare, exciting elements of her beauty, and the truth in Aldous's comparison of her to one of the tall women in a Florentine fresco. But he felt himself a good deal baffled by her, all the same. In some ways, so far as any man who is not the lover can understand such things, he understood why Aldous had fallen in love with her; in others, she bore no relation whatever to the woman his thoughts had been shaping all these years as his friend's fit and natural wife.

Luncheon passed as easily as any meal could be expected to do, of which Mr. Boyce was partial president. During the preceding month or two he had definitely assumed the character of an invalid, although to inexperienced eyes like Marcella's there did not seem to be very much the matter. But, whatever the facts might be, Mr. Boyce's adroit use of them had made a great difference to his position in his own household. His wife's sarcastic freedom of manner was less apparent; and he was obviously less in awe of her. Meanwhile he was as sore as ever towards the Raeburns, and no more inclined to take any particular pleasure in Marcella's prospects, or to make himself agreeable towards his future son-in-law. He and Mrs. Boyce had been formally asked in Miss Raeburn's best hand to the Court ball, but he had at once snappishly announced

his intention of staying at home. Marcella sometimes looked back with astonishment to his eagerness for social notice when they first came to Mellor. Clearly the rising irritability of illness had made it doubly unpleasant to him to owe all that he was likely to get on that score to his own daughter; and, moreover, he had learnt to occupy himself more continuously on his own land and with his own affairs.

As to the state of the village, neither Marcella's entreaties nor reproaches had any effect upon him. When it appeared certain that he would be summoned for some specially flagrant piece of neglect he would spend a few shillings on repairs; otherwise not a farthing. All that filial softening towards him of which Marcella had been conscious in the early autumn had died away in her. She said to herself now plainly and bitterly that it was a misfortune to belong to him; and she would have pitied her mother most heartily if her mother had ever allowed her the smallest expression of such a feeling. As it was, she was left to wonder and chafe at her mother's new-born mildness.

In the drawing-room, after luncheon, Hallin came up to Marcella in a corner, and, smiling, drew from his pocket a folded sheet of foolscap.

'I made Aldous give me his speech to show you, before to-morrow night,' he said. 'He would hardly let me take it, said it was stupid, and that you would not agree with it. But I wanted you to see how he does these things. He speaks now, on an average, two

or three times a week. Each time, even for an audience of a score or two of village folk, he writes out what he has to say. Then he speaks it entirely without notes. In this way, though he has not much natural gift, he is making himself gradually an effective and practical speaker. The danger with him, of course, is lest he should be over-subtle and over-critical—not simple and popular enough.'

Marcella took the paper half unwillingly and glanced over it in silence.

'You are sorry he is a Tory, is that it?' he said to her, but in a lower voice, and sitting down beside her.

Mrs. Boyce, just catching the words from where she sat with her work, at the further side of the room, looked up with a double wonder—wonder at Marcella's folly, wonder still more at the deference with which men like Aldous Raeburn and Hallin treated her. It was inevitable, of course—youth and beauty rule the world. But the mother, under no spell herself, and of keen, cool wit, resented the intellectual confusion, the lowering of standards involved.

'I suppose so,' said Marcella, stupidly, in answer to Hallin's question, fidgeting the papers under her hand. Then his curious confessor's gift, his quiet questioning look with its sensitive human interest to all before him, told upon her.

'I am sorry he does not look further ahead, to the great changes that must come,' she added hurriedly.

'This is all about details, palliatives. I want him to be more impatient.'

'Great political changes you mean?'

She nodded; then added—

'But only for the sake, of course, of great social changes to come after.'

He pondered a moment.

'Aldous has never believed in *great* changes coming suddenly. He constantly looks upon me as rash in the things *I* adopt and believe in. But for the contriving unceasing effort of every day to make that part of the social machine in which a man finds himself work better and more equitably, I have never seen Aldous's equal—for the steady passion, the persistence, of it.'

She looked up. His pale face had taken to itself glow and fire; his eyes were full of strenuous, nay, severe expression. Her foolish pride rebelled a little.

'Of course, I haven't seen much of that yet,' she said slowly.

His look for a moment was indignant, incredulous, then melted into a charming eagerness.

'But you will! naturally you will!—see everything. I hug myself sometimes now for pure pleasure that someone besides his grandfather and I will know what Aldous is and does. Oh! the people on the estate know; his neighbours are beginning to know; and now that he is going into Parliament, the country will know some day, if work and high intelligence have the power I believe. But I am impatient! In the first place—I

may say it to you, Miss Boyce!—I want Aldous to come out of that *manner* of his to strangers, which is the only bit of the true Tory in him; *you* can get rid of it, no one else can.—How long shall I give you?—And in the next, I want the world not to be wasting itself on baser stuff when it might be praising Aldous!'

'Does he mean Mr. Wharton?' thought Marcella, quickly. 'But this world—our world—hates him and runs him down.'

But she had no time to answer, for the door opened to admit Aldous, flushed and bright-eyed, looking round the room immediately for her, and bearing a parcel in his left hand.

'Does she love him at all?' thought Hallin, with a nervous stiffening of all his lithe frame, as he walked away to talk to Mrs. Boyce; 'or, in spite of all her fine talk, is she just marrying him for his money and position?'

Meanwhile, Aldous had drawn Marcella into the Stone Parlour and was standing by the fire with his arm covetously round her.

'I have lost two hours with you I might have had, just because a tiresome man missed his train. Make up for it by liking these pretty things a little, for my sake and my mother's.'

He opened the jeweller's case, took out the fine old pearls—necklace and bracelets—it contained, and put them into her hand. They were his first considerable gift to her, and had been chosen for association's sake,

seeing that his mother had also worn them before her marriage.

She flushed first of all with a natural pleasure, the girl delighting in her gaud. Then she allowed herself to be kissed, which was, indeed, inevitable. Finally she turned them over and over in her hands; and he began to be puzzled by her.

'They are much too good for me. I don't know whether you ought to give me such precious things. I am dreadfully careless and forgetful. Mamma always says so.'

'I shall want you to wear them so often that you won't have a chance of forgetting them,' he said, gaily.

'Will you? Will you want me to wear them so often?' she asked, in a odd voice. 'Anyway, I should like to have just these, and nothing else. I am glad that we know nobody, and have no friends, and that I shall have so few presents. You won't give me many jewels, will you?' she said, suddenly, insistently, turning to him. 'I shouldn't know what to do with them. I used to have a magpie's wish for them; and now—I don't know, but they don't give me pleasure. Not these, of course—not these!' she added, hurriedly, taking them up and beginning to fasten the bracelets on her wrists.

Aldous looked perplexed.

'My darling!' he said, half laughing, and in the tone of the apologist, 'You know we *have* such a lot of things. And I am afraid my grandfather will want to

give them all to you. Need one think so much about it? It isn't as though they had to be bought fresh. They go with pretty gowns, don't they, and other people like to see them?'

'No, but it's what they imply—the wealth—the *having* so much while other people want so much. Things begin to oppress me so!' she broke out, instinctively moving away from him that she might express herself with more energy. 'I like luxuries so desperately, and when I get them I seem to myself now the vulgarest creature alive, who has no right to an opinion or an enthusiasm, or anything else worth having. You must not let me like them—you must help me not to care about them!'

Raeburn's eye as he looked at her was tenderness itself. He could of course neither mock her, nor put what she said aside. This question she had raised, this most thorny of all the personal questions of the present—the ethical relation of the individual to the World's Fair and its vanities—was, as it happened, a question far more sternly and robustly real to him than it was to her. Every word in his few sentences, as they stood talking by the fire, bore on it for a practised ear the signs of a long wrestle of the heart.

But to Marcella it sounded tame; her ear was haunted by the fragments of another tune which she seemed to be perpetually trying to recall and piece together. Aldous's slow minor made her impatient.

He turned presently to ask her what she had been

doing with her morning—asking her with a certain precision, and observing her attentively. She replied that she had been showing Mr. Wharton the house, that he had walked down with her to the village, and was gone to a meeting at Widrington. Then she remarked that he was very good company, and very clever, but dreadfully sure of his own opinion. Finally she laughed, and said drily:

'There will be no putting him down all the same. I haven't told anybody yet, but he saved my life this morning.'

Aldous caught her wrists.

'Saved your life! Dear—What *do* you mean?'

She explained, giving the little incident all—perhaps more than—its dramatic due. He listened with evident annoyance, and stood pondering when she came to an end.

'So I shall be expected to take quite a different view of him henceforward?' he inquired at last, looking round at her, with a very forced smile.

'I am sure I don't know that it matters to him what view anybody takes of him,' she cried, flushing. 'He certainly takes the frankest views of other people, and expresses them.'

And while she played with the pearls in their box she gave a vivid account of her morning's talk with the Radical candidate for West Brookshire, and of their village expedition.

There was a certain relief in describing the scorn

with which her acts and ideals had been treated; and, underneath, a woman's curiosity as to how Aldous would take it.

'I don't know what business he had to express himself so frankly,' said Aldous, turning to the fire and carefully putting it together. 'He hardly knows you—it was, I think, an impertinence.'

He stood upright, with his back to the hearth, a strong, capable, frowning Englishman, very much on his dignity. Such a moment must surely have become him in the eyes of a girl that loved him. Marcella proved restive under it.

'No; it's very natural,' she protested quickly. 'When people are so much in earnest they don't stop to think about impertinence! I never met anyone who dug up one's thoughts by the roots as he does.'

Aldous was startled by her flush, her sudden attitude of opposition. His intermittent lack of readiness overtook him, and there was an awkward silence. Then, pulling himself together with a strong hand, he left the subject and began to talk of her straw-plaiting scheme, of the Gairsley meeting, and of Hallin. But in the middle Marcella unexpectedly said:—

'I wish you would tell me, seriously, what reasons you have for not liking Mr. Wharton?—other than politics, I mean?'

Her black eyes fixed him with a keen insistence.

He was silent a moment with surprise; then he said:—

'I had rather not rake up old scores.'

She shrugged her shoulders, and he was roused to come and put his arm round her again, she shrinking and turning her reddened face away.

'Dearest,' he said, 'you shall put me in charity with all the world. But the worst of it is,' he added, half laughing, 'that I don't see how I am to help disliking him doubly henceforward for having had the luck to put that fire out instead of me!'

CHAPTER VI

A FEW busy and eventful weeks, days never forgotten by Marcella in after years, passed quickly by. Parliament met in the third week of January. Ministers, according to universal expectation, found themselves confronted by a damaging amendment on the Address, and were defeated by a small majority. A dissolution and appeal to the country followed immediately, and the meetings and speech-makings, already active throughout the constituencies, were carried forward with redoubled energy. In the Tudley End division, Aldous Raeburn was fighting a somewhat younger opponent of the same country-gentleman stock —a former fag indeed of his at Eton—whose zeal and fluency gave him plenty to do. Under ordinary circumstances Aldous would have thrown himself with all his heart and mind into a contest which involved for him the most stimulating of possibilities, personal and public. But, as these days went over, he found his appetite for the struggle flagging, and was harassed rather than spurred by his adversary's activity. The real truth was that he could not see enough of Marcella!

A curious uncertainty and unreality, moreover, seemed to have crept into some of their relations; and it had begun to gall and fever him that Wharton should be staying there, week after week, beside her, in her father's house, able to spend all the free intervals of the fight in her society, strengthening an influence which Raeburn's pride and delicacy had hardly allowed him as yet, in spite of his instinctive jealousy from the beginning, to take into his thoughts at all, but which was now apparent, not only to himself but to others.

In vain did he spend every possible hour at Mellor he could snatch from a conflict in which his party, his grandfather, and his own personal fortunes were all deeply interested. In vain—with a tardy instinct that it was to Mr. Boyce's dislike of himself, and to the wilful fancy for Wharton's society which this dislike had promoted, that Wharton's long stay at Mellor was largely owing—did Aldous subdue himself to propitiations and amenities wholly foreign to a strong character long accustomed to rule without thinking about it. Mr. Boyce showed himself not a whit less partial to Wharton than before; pressed him at least twice in Raeburn's hearing to make Mellor his head-quarters so long as it suited him, and behaved with an irritable malice with regard to some of the details of the wedding arrangements, which neither Mrs. Boyce's indignation nor Marcella's discomfort and annoyance could restrain. Clearly there was in him a strong consciousness that by his attentions to the Radical candidate he was asserting

his independence of the Raeburns, and nothing for the moment seemed to be more of an object with him, even though his daughter was going to marry the Raeburns' heir. Meanwhile, Wharton was always ready to walk or chat or play billiards with his host in the intervals of his own campaign; and his society had thus come to count considerably among the scanty daily pleasures of a sickly and disappointed man. Mrs. Boyce did not like her guest, and took no pains to disguise it, least of all from Wharton. But it seemed to be no longer possible for her to take the vigorous measures she would once have taken to get rid of him.

In vain, too, did Miss Raeburn do her best for the nephew to whom she was still devoted, in spite of his deplorable choice of a wife. She took in the situation as a whole probably sooner than anybody else, and she instantly made heroic efforts to see more of Marcella, to get her to come oftener to the Court, and in many various ways to procure the poor deluded Aldous more of his betrothed's society. She paid many chattering and fussy visits to Mellor—visits which chafed Marcella—and before long, indeed, roused a certain suspicion in the girl's wilful mind. Between Miss Raeburn and Mrs. Boyce there was a curious understanding. It was always tacit, and never amounted to friendship, still less to intimacy. But it often yielded a certain melancholy consolation to Aldous Raeburn's great-aunt. It was clear to her that this strange mother was just as much convinced as she was that

Aldous was making a great mistake, and that Marcella was not worthy of him. But the engagement being there—a fact not apparently to be undone—both ladies showed themselves disposed to take pains with it, to protect it against aggression. Mrs. Boyce found herself becoming more of a *chaperon* than she had ever yet professed to be; and Miss Raeburn, as we have said, made repeated efforts to capture Marcella and hold her for Aldous, her lawful master.

But Marcella proved extremely difficult to manage. In the first place she was a young person of many engagements. Her village scheme absorbed a great deal of time. She was deep in a varied correspondence, in the engagement of teachers, the provision of workrooms, the collecting and registering of workers, the organisation of local committees and so forth. New sides of the girl's character, new capacities and capabilities were coming out; new forms of her natural power over her fellows were developing every day; she was beginning, under the incessant stimulus of Wharton's talk, to read and think on social and economic subjects, with some system and coherence, and it was evident that she took a passionate mental pleasure in it all. And the more pleasure these activities gave her, the less she had to spare for those accompaniments of her engagement and her position that was to be, which once, as Mrs. Boyce's sharp eyes perceived, had been quite normally attractive to her.

'Why do you take up her time so, with all these

things?' said Miss Raeburn impatiently to Lady Winterbourne, who was now Marcella's obedient helper in everything she chose to initiate. 'She doesn't care for anything she *ought* to care about at this time, and Aldous sees nothing of her. As for her trousseau, Mrs. Boyce declares she has had to do it all. Marcella won't even go up to London to have her wedding-dress fitted!',

Lady Winterbourne looked up bewildered.

'But I can't make her go and have her wedding-dress fitted, Agneta! And I always feel you don't know what a fine creature she is. You don't really appreciate her. It's splendid the ideas she has about this work, and the way she throws herself into it.'

'I dare say!' said Miss Raeburn, indignantly. 'That's just what I object to. Why can't she throw herself into being in love with Aldous! That's her business, I imagine, just now—if she were a young woman like anybody else one had ever seen—instead of holding aloof from everything he does, and never being there when he wants her. Oh! I have no patience with her. But, of course, I must—' said Miss Raeburn, hastily correcting herself—'of course, I must have patience.'

'It will all come right, I am sure, when they are married,' said Lady Winterbourne, rather helplessly.

'That's just what my brother says,' cried Miss Raeburn, exasperated. 'He won't hear a word—declares she is odd and original, and that Aldous will

soon know how to manage her. It's all very well; nowadays men *don't* manage their wives; that's all gone with the rest. And I am sure, my dear, if she behaves after she is married as she is doing now, with that most objectionable person Mr. Wharton—walking, and talking, and taking up his ideas, and going to his meetings—she'll be a handful for any husband.'

'Mr. Wharton!' said Lady Winterbourne, astonished. Her absent black eyes, the eyes of the dreamer, of the person who lives by a few intense affections, saw little or nothing of what was going on immediately under them. 'Oh! but that is because he is staying in the house, and he is a Socialist; she calls herself one——'

'My *dear*,' said Miss Raeburn, interrupting emphatically; 'if—you—had—now—an unmarried daughter at home—engaged or not—would you care to have Harry Wharton hanging about after her?'

'Harry Wharton?' said the other, pondering; 'he is the Levens' cousin, isn't he? he used to stay with them. I don't think I have seen him since then. But yes, I do remember; there was something—something disagreeable?'

She stopped with a hesitating, interrogative air. No one talked less scandal, no one put the uglinesses of life away from her with a hastier hand than Lady Winterbourne. She was one of the most consistent of moral epicures.

'Yes, *extremely* disagreeable,' said Miss Raeburn, sitting bolt upright. 'The man has no principles—never had any, since he was a child in petticoats. I know Aldous thinks him unscrupulous in politics and everything else. And then, just when you are worked to death, and have hardly a moment for your own affairs, to have a man of that type always at hand to spend odd times with your lady love—flattering her, engaging her in his ridiculous schemes, encouraging her in all the extravagances she has got her head twice too full of already, setting her against your own ideas and the life she will have to live—you will admit that it is not exactly soothing!'

'Poor Aldous!' said Lady Winterbourne thoughtfully, looking far ahead with her odd look of absent rigidity, which had in reality so little to do with a character essentially soft; 'but you see he *did* know all about her opinions. And I don't think—no, I really don't think—I could speak to her.'

In truth, this woman of nearly seventy—old in years, but wholly young in temperament—was altogether under Marcella's spell—more at ease with her already than with most of her own children, finding in her satisfaction for a hundred instincts, suppressed or starved by her own environment, fascinated by the girl's friendship, and eagerly grateful for her visits. Miss Raeburn thought it all both incomprehensible and silly.

'Apparently no one can!' cried that lady in answer

to her friend's demurrer; 'is all the world afraid of her?'

And she departed in wrath. But she knew, nevertheless, that she was just as much afraid of Marcella as anybody else. In her own sphere at the Court, or in points connected with what was due to the family, or to Lord Maxwell especially, as the head of it, this short, capable old lady could hold her own amply with Aldous's betrothed, could maintain, indeed, a sharp and caustic dignity, which kept Marcella very much in order. Miss Raeburn on the defensive was strong; but when it came to attacking Marcella's own ideas and proceedings, Lord Maxwell's sister became shrewdly conscious of her own weaknesses. She had no wish to measure her wits on any general field with Marcella's. She said to herself that the girl was too clever, and would talk you down.

Meanwhile, things went untowardly in various ways. Marcella disciplined herself before the Gairsley meeting, and went thither resolved to give Aldous as much sympathy as she could. But the performance only repelled a mind over which Wharton was every day gaining more influence. There was a portly baronet in the chair; there were various Primrose dames on the platform and among the audience; there was a considerable representation of clergy; and the labourers present seemed to Marcella the most obsequious of their kind. Aldous spoke well—or so the audience seemed to think; but she could feel no enthusiasm for any-

thing that he said. She gathered that he advocated a Government inspection of cottages, more stringent precautions against cattle disease, better technical instruction, a more abundant provision of allotments and small freeholds, &c. ; and he said many cordial and wise-sounding things in praise of a progress which should go safely and wisely from step to step, and run no risks of dangerous reaction. But the assumptions on which, as she told herself rebelliously, it all went—that the rich and the educated must rule, and the poor obey ; that existing classes and rights, the forces of individualism and competition, must and would go on pretty much as they were ; that great houses and great people, the English land and game system, and all the rest of our odious class paraphernalia were in the order of the universe ; these ideas, conceived as the furniture of Aldous's mind, threw her again into a ferment of passionate opposition. And when the noble baronet in the chair—to her eye, a pompous, frock-coated stick, sacrificing his after-dinner sleep for once, that he might the more effectually secure it in the future—proposed a vote of confidence in the Conservative candidate ; when the vote was carried with much cheering and rattling of feet; when the Primrose dames on the platform smiled graciously down upon the meeting as one smiles at good children in their moments of pretty behaviour ; and when, finally, scores of toil-stained labourers, young and old, went up to have a word and a hand-shake with 'Muster Raeburn,' Marcella

held herself aloof and cold, with a look that threatened sarcasm should she be spoken to. Miss Raeburn, glancing furtively round at her, was outraged anew by her expression.

'She will be a thorn in all our sides,' thought that lady. 'Aldous is a fool!—a poor dear noble misguided fool!'

Then on the way home, she and Aldous drove together. Marcella tried to argue, grew vehement, and said bitter things for the sake of victory, till at last Aldous, tired, worried, and deeply wounded, could bear it no longer.

'Let it be, dear, let it be!' he entreated, snatching at her hand as they rolled along through a stormy night. 'We grope in a dark world—you see some points of light in it, I see others—won't you give me credit for doing what I can—seeing what I can? I am sure —*sure*—you will find it easier to bear with differences when we are quite together—when there are no longer all these hateful duties and engagements—and persons —between us.'

'Persons! I don't know what you mean!' said Marcella.

Aldous only just restrained himself in time. Out of sheer fatigue and slackness of nerve he had been all but betrayed into some angry speech on the subject of Wharton, the echoes of whose fantastic talk, as it seemed to him, were always hanging about Mellor when he went there. But he did refrain, and was thank-

ful. That he was indeed jealous and disturbed, that he had been jealous and disturbed from the moment Harry Wharton had set foot in Mellor, he himself knew quite well. But to play the jealous part in public was more than the Raeburn pride could bear. There was the dread, too, of defining the situation—of striking some vulgar irrevocable note.

So he parried Marcella's exclamation by asking her whether she had any idea how many human hands a parliamentary candidate had to shake between breakfast and bed; and then, having so slipped into another tone, he tried to amuse himself and her by some of the daily humours of the contest. She lent herself to it and laughed, her look mostly turned away from him, as though she were following the light of the carriage lamps as it slipped along the snow-laden hedges, her hand lying limply in his. But neither were really gay. His soreness of mind grew as in the pauses of talk he came to realise more exactly the failure of the evening—of his very successful and encouraging meeting—from his own private point of view.

'Didn't you like that last speech?' he broke out suddenly—'that labourer's speech? I thought you would. It was entirely his own idea—nobody asked him to do it.'

In reality Gairsley represented a corner of the estate which Aldous had specially made his own. He had spent much labour and thought on the improvement of what had been a backward district, and in particular

he had tried a small profit-sharing experiment upon a farm there which he had taken into his own hands for the purpose. The experiment had met with fair success, and the labourer in question, who was one of the workers in it, had volunteered some approving remarks upon it at the meeting.

'Oh! it was very proper and respectful!' said Marcella, hastily.

The carriage rolled on some yards before Aldous replied. Then he spoke in a drier tone than he had ever yet used to her.

'You do it injustice, I think. The man is perfectly independent, and an honest fellow. I was grateful to him for what he said.'

'Of course, I am no judge!' cried Marcella, quickly — repentantly. 'Why did you ask me? I saw everything crooked, I suppose—it was your Primrose dames—they got upon my nerves. Why did you have them? I didn't mean to vex and hurt you—I didn't indeed—it was all the other way—and now I have.'

She turned upon him laughing, but also half crying, as he could tell by the flutter of her breath.

He vowed he was not hurt, and once more changed both talk and tone. They reached the drive's end without a word of Wharton. But Marcella went to bed, hating herself, and Aldous, after his solitary drive home, sat up long and late, feverishly pacing and thinking.

Then next evening how differently things fell!

Marcella, having spent the afternoon at the Court, hearing all the final arrangements for the ball and bearing with Miss Raeburn in a way which astonished herself, came home full of a sense of duty done, and announced to her mother that she was going to Mr. Wharton's meeting in the Baptist chapel that evening.

'Unnecessary, don't you think!' said Mrs. Boyce, lifting her eyebrows. 'However, if you go, I shall go with you.'

Most mothers, dealing with a girl of twenty-one, under the circumstances, would have said, 'I had rather you stayed at home.' Mrs. Boyce never employed locutions of this kind. She recognised with perfect calmness that Marcella's bringing up, and especially her independent years in London, had made it impossible.

Marcella fidgeted.

'I don't know why you should, mamma. Papa will be sure to want you. Of course, I shall take Deacon.'

'Please order dinner a quarter of an hour earlier, and tell Deacon to bring down my walking things to the hall,' was all Mrs. Boyce said in answer.

Marcella walked upstairs with her head very stiff. So her mother, and Miss Raeburn too, thought it necessary to keep watch on her. How preposterous! She thought of her free and easy relations with her Kensington student-friends, and wondered when a more reasonable idea of the relations between men and women would begin to penetrate English country society.

Mr. Boyce talked recklessly of going too.

'Of course, I know he will spout seditious nonsense,' he said irritably to his wife, 'but it's the fellow's power of talk that is so astonishing. *He* isn't troubled with your Raeburn heaviness.'

Marcella came into the room as the discussion was going on.

'If papa goes,' she said in an undertone to her mother as she passed her, 'it will spoil the meeting. The labourers will turn sulky. I shouldn't wonder if they did or said something unpleasant. As it is, *you* had much better not come, mamma. They are sure to attack the cottages—and other things.'

Mrs. Boyce took no notice as far as she herself was concerned, but her quiet decision at last succeeded in leaving Mr. Boyce safely settled by the fire, provided as usual with a cigarette and a French novel.

The meeting was held in a little iron Baptist chapel, erected some few years before on the outskirts of the village, to the grief and scandal of Mr. Harden. There were about a hundred and twenty labourers present, and at the back some boys and girls, come to giggle and make a noise—nobody else. The Baptist minister, a smooth-faced young man, possessed as it turned out of opinions little short of Wharton's own in point of vigour and rigour, was already in command. A few late comers, as they slouched in, stole side looks at Marcella and the veiled lady in black beside her, sitting in the corner of the last bench; and Marcella nodded to one or two of the audience, Jim Hurd amongst them. Otherwise no

one took any notice of them. It was the first time that Mrs. Boyce had been inside any building belonging to the village.

Wharton arrived late. He had been canvassing at a distance, and neither of the Mellor ladies had seen him all day. He slipped up the bench with a bow and a smile to greet them. 'I am done!' he said to Marcella, as he took off his hat. 'My voice is gone, my mind ditto. I shall drivel for half an hour and let them go. Did you ever see such a stolid set?'

'You will rouse them,' said Marcella.

Her eyes were animated, her colour high, and she took no account at all of his plea of weariness.

'You challenge me? I must rouse them—that was what you came to see? Is that it?'

She laughed and made no answer. He left her and went up to the minister's desk, the men shuffling their feet a little, and rattling a stick here and there as he did so.

The young minister took the chair and introduced the speaker. He had a strong Yorkshire accent, and his speech was divided between the most vehement attacks, couched in the most Scriptural language, upon capital and privilege—that is to say, on landlords and the land system, on State churches and the 'idle rich,' interspersed with quavering returns upon himself, as though he were scared by his own invective. 'My brothers, let us be *calm*!' he would say after every burst of passion, with a long deep-voiced emphasis on

the last word; 'let us, above all things, be *calm*!'—and then bit by bit voice and denunciation would begin to mount again towards a fresh climax of loud-voiced attack, only to sink again to the same lamb-like refrain. Mrs. Boyce's thin lip twitched, and Marcella bore the good gentleman a grudge for providing her mother with so much unnecessary amusement.

As for Wharton, at the opening of his speech he spoke both awkwardly and flatly; and Marcella had a momentary shock. He was, as he said, tired, and his wits were not at command. He began with the general political programme of the party to which—on its extreme left wing—he proclaimed himself to belong. This programme was, of course, by now a newspaper commonplace of the stalest sort. He himself recited it without enthusiasm, and it was received without a spark, so far as appeared, of interest or ageement. The minister gave an 'hear, hear,' of a loud official sort; the men made no sign.

'They might be a set of Dutch cheeses!' thought Marcella indignantly after a while. 'But, after all, why should they care for all this? I shall have to get up in a minute and stop those children romping.'

But through all this, as it were, Wharton was only waiting for his second wind. There came a moment when, dropping his quasi-official and high political tone, he said suddenly with another voice and emphasis:

'Well now, my men, I'll be bound you're thinking, "That's all pretty enough!—we haven't got anything

against it—we dare say it's all right; but we don't care a brass ha'porth about any of it! If that's all you'd got to say to us, you might have let us bide at home. We don't have none too much time to rest our bones a bit by the fire, and talk to the missus and the kids. Why didn't you let us alone, instead of bringing us out in the cold?"

'Well, but it *isn't* all I've got to say—and you know it—because I've spoken to you before. What I've been talking about is all true, and all important, and you'll see it some day when you're fit. But what can men in your position know about it, or care about it? What do any of you want, but *bread*——'

—He thundered on the desk—

'—a bit of decent *comfort*—a bit of *freedom*—freedom from tyrants who call themselves your betters!—a bit of rest in your old age, a home that's something better than a dog-hole, a wage that's something better than starvation, an honest share in the wealth you are making every day and every hour for other people to gorge and plunder!'

He stopped a moment to see how *that* took. A knot of young men in a corner rattled their sticks vigorously. The older men had begun at any rate to look at the speaker. The boys on the back benches instinctively stopped scuffling.

Then he threw himself into a sort of rapid question-and-answer. What were their wages—eleven shillings a week?

'Not they!' cried a man from the middle of the chapel. 'Yer mus reckon it wet an dry. I wor turned back two days las week, an' two days this, *fower* shillin lost each week—that's what I call skinnin ov yer.'

Wharton nodded at him approvingly. By now he knew the majority of the men in each village by name, and never forgot a face or a biography. 'You're right there, Watkins. Eleven shillings, then, when it isn't less, never more, and precious often less; and harvest money—the people that are kind enough to come round and ask you to vote Tory for them make a deal of that, don't they?—and a few odds and ends here and there—precious few of them! There that's about it for wages, isn't it? Thirty pounds a year, somewhere about, to keep a wife and children on—and for ten hours a day work, not counting meal times—that's it, I think. Oh you *are* well off!—aren't you?'

He dropped his arms, folded, on the desk in front of him, and paused to look at them, his bright kindling eye running over rank after rank. A chuckle of rough laughter, bitter and jeering, ran through the benches. Then they broke out and applauded him.

Well, and about their cottages?

His glance caught Marcella, passed to her mother sitting stiffly motionless under her veil. He drew himself up, thought a moment, then threw himself far forward again over the desk as though the better to launch what he had to say, his voice taking a grinding determined note.

He had been in all parts of the division, he said; seen everything, inquired into everything. No doubt, on the great properties there had been a good deal done of late years—public opinion had effected something, the landlords had been forced to disgorge some of the gains wrested from labour, to pay for the decent housing of the labourer. But did anybody suppose that *enough* had been done? Why, he had seen *dens*—ay, on the best properties—not fit for the pigs that the farmers wouldn't let the labourers keep, lest they should steal their straw for the littering of them!—where a man was bound to live the life of a beast, and his children after him.

A tall thin man of about sixty rose in his place, and pointed a long quavering finger at the speaker.

'What is it, Darwin? speak up!' said Wharton, dropping at once into the colloquial tone, and stooping forward to listen.

'My sleepin room's six foot nine by seven foot six. We have to shift our bed for the rain's comin in, an' yer may see for yoursels ther ain't much room to shift it in. An' beyont us ther's a room for the chillen, same size as ourn, an' no window, nothin but the door into us. Ov a summer night the chillen, three on em, is all of a sweat afore they're asleep. An' no garden, an' no chance o' decent ways nohow. An' if yer ask for a bit o' repairs yer get sworn at. An' that's all that most on us can get out of Squire Boyce!'

There was a hasty whisper among some of the men round him, as they glanced over their shoulders at the

two ladies on the back bench. One or two of them half rose, and tried to pull him down. Wharton looked at Marcella; it seemed to him he saw a sort of passionate satisfaction on her pale face, and in the erect carriage of her head. Then she stooped to the side and whispered to her mother. Mrs. Boyce shook her head and sat on immovable. All this took but a second or two.

'Ah, well,' said Wharton; 'we won't have names, that'll do us no good. It's not the *men* you've got to go for so much—though we shall go for them too before long when we've got the law more on our side. It's the system. It 's the whole way of dividing the wealth that *you* make, you and your children—by your work, your hard, slavish, incessant work—between you and those who *don't* work, who live on your labour and grow fat on your poverty! What we want is *a fair division.* There *ought* to be wealth enough—there *is* wealth enough for all in this blessed country. The earth gives it; the sun gives it; labour extracts and piles it up. Why should one class take three-fourths of it and leave you and your fellow-workers in the cities the miserable pittance which is all you have to starve and breed on? Why?—*why*? I say. Why!—because you are a set of dull, jealous, poor-spirited *cowards*, unable to pull together, to trust each other, to give up so much as a pot of beer a week for the sake of your children and your liberties and your class—there, *that*'s why it is, and I tell it you straight out!'

He drew himself up, folded his arms across his chest, and looked at them—scorn and denunciation in every line of his young frame, and the blaze of his blue eye. A murmur ran through the room. Some of the men laughed excitedly. Darwin sprang up again.

'You keep the perlice off us, an gie us the cuttin up o' their bloomin parks an we'll do it fast enough,' he cried.

'Much good that'll do you just at present,' said Wharton, contemptuously. 'Now, you just listen to me.'

And, leaning forward over the desk again, his finger pointed at the room, he went through the regular Socialist programme as it affects the country districts—the transference of authority within the villages from the few to the many, the landlords taxed more and more heavily during the transition time for the provision of house room, water, light, education and amusement for the labourer; and ultimately land and capital at the free disposal of the State, to be supplied to the worker on demand at the most moderate terms, while the annexed rent and interest of the capitalist class relieves him of taxes, and the disappearance of squire, State parson, and plutocrat leaves him master in his own house, the slave of no man, the equal of all. And, as a first step to this new Jerusalem—*organisation*!—self-sacrifice enough to form and maintain a union, to vote for Radical and Socialist candidates in the teeth of the people who have coals and blankets to give away.

'Then I suppose you think you'd be turned out of your cottages, dismissed your work, made to smart for it somehow. Just you try! There are people all over the country ready to back you, if you'd only back yourselves. But you *won't*. You won't fight—that's the worst of you; that's what makes all of us *sick* when we come down to talk to you. You won't spare twopence halfpenny a week from boozing—not you!—to subscribe to a union, and take the first little step towards filling your stomachs and holding your heads up as free men. What's the good of your grumbling? I suppose you'll go on like that—grumbling and starving and cringing—and talking big of the things you could do if you would:—and all the time not one honest effort—not one!—to better yourself, to pull the yoke off your necks! By the Lord! I tell you it's a *damned* sort of business talking to fellows like you!'

Marcella started as he flung the words out with a bitter, nay a brutal emphasis. The smooth-faced minister coughed loudly with a sudden movement, half got up to remonstrate, and then thought better of it. Mrs. Boyce for the first time showed some animation under her veil. Her eyes followed the speaker with a quick attention.

As for the men, as they turned clumsily to stare at, to laugh, or talk to each other, Marcella could hardly make out whether they were angered or fascinated. Whichever it was, Wharton cared for none of them. His blood was up; his fatigue thrown off. Standing

there in front of them, his hands in his pockets, pale with the excitement of speaking, his curly head thrown out against the whitened wall of the chapel, he lashed into the men before him, talking their language, their dialect even, laying bare their weaknesses, sensualities, indecisions, painting in the sombrest colours the grim truths of their melancholy lives.

Marcella could hardly breathe. It seemed to her that, among these cottagers, she had never lived till now—under the blaze of these eyes—within the vibration of this voice. Never had she so realised the power of this singular being. He was scourging, dissecting, the weather-beaten men before him, as, with a difference, he had scourged, dissected her. She found herself exulting in his powers of tyranny, in the naked thrust of his words, so nervous, so pitiless. And then by a sudden flash she thought of him by Mrs. Hurd's fire, the dying child on his knee, against his breast. 'Here,' she thought, while her pulses leapt, 'is the leader for me—for these. Let him call, I will follow!'

It was as though he followed the ranging of her thought, for suddenly, when she and his hearers least expected it, his tone changed, his storm of speech sank. He fell into a strain of quiet sympathy, encouragement, hope; dwelt with a good deal of homely iteration on the immediate practical steps which each man before him could if he would take towards the common end; spoke of the help and support lying ready for the country labourers throughout democratic England if

they would but put forward their own energies and quit themselves like men; pointed forward to a time of plenty, education, social peace; and so—with some good-tempered banter of his opponent, old Dodgson, and some precise instructions as to how and where they were to record their votes on the day of election—came to an end. Two or three other speeches followed, and among them a few stumbling words from Hurd. Marcella approved herself and applauded him, as she recognised a sentence or two taken bodily from the 'Labour Clarion' of the preceding week. Then a resolution pledging the meeting to support the Liberal candidate was passed unanimously amid evident excitement. It was the first time that such a thing had ever happened in Mellor.

Mrs. Boyce treated her visitor on their way home with a new respect, mixed, however, as usual, with her prevailing irony. For one who knew her, her manner implied, not that she liked him any more, but that a man so well trained to his own profession must always hold his own.

As for Marcella, she said little or nothing. But Wharton, in the dark of the carriage, had a strange sense that her eye was often on him, that her mood marched with his, and that if he could have spoken her response would have been electric.

When he had helped her out of the carriage, and they stood in the vestibule—Mrs. Boyce having walked

on into the hall—he said to her, his voice hoarse with fatigue:—

'Did I do your bidding, did I rouse them?'

Marcella was seized with sudden shyness.

'You rated them enough.'

'Well, did you disapprove?'

'Oh, no! it seems to be your way.'

'My proof of friendship? Well, can there be a greater? Will you show me some to-morrow?'

'How can I?'

'Will you criticise?—tell me where you thought I was a fool to-night, or a hypocrite? Your mother would.'

'I dare say!' said Marcella, her breath quickening; 'but don't expect it from me.'

'Why?'

'Because—because, I don't pretend. I don't know whether you roused them, but you roused *me*.'

She swept on before him into the dark hall, without giving him a moment for reply, took her candle, and disappeared.

Wharton found his own staircase, and went up to bed. The light he carried showed his smiling eyes bent on the ground, his mouth still moving as though with some pleasant desire of speech.

CHAPTER VII

WHARTON was sitting alone in the big Mellor drawing-room, after dinner. He had drawn one of the few easy chairs the room possessed to the fire, and with his feet on the fender, and one of Mr. Boyce's French novels on his knee, he was intensely enjoying a moment of physical ease. The work of these weeks of canvassing and speaking had been arduous, and he was naturally indolent. Now, beside this fire and at a distance it amazed him that any motive whatever, public or private, should ever have been strong enough to take him out through the mire on these winter nights to spout himself hoarse to a parcel of rustics. 'What did I do it for?' he asked himself; 'what am I going to do it for again to-morrow?'

Ten o'clock. Mr. Boyce was gone to bed. No more entertaining of *him* to be done; one might be thankful for that mercy. Mrs. Boyce and her mother would, he supposed, be down directly. They had gone up to dress at nine. It was the night of the Maxwell Court ball, and the carriage had been ordered for half-past ten. In a few minutes he would see Miss Boyce

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in her new dress, wearing Raeburn's pearls. He was extraordinarily observant, and a number of little incidents and domestic arrangements bearing on the feminine side of Marcella's life had been apparent to him from the beginning. He knew, for instance, that the trousseau was being made at home, and that during the last few weeks the lady for whom it was destined had shown an indifference to the progress of it which seemed to excite a dumb annoyance in her mother. Curious woman, Mrs. Boyce!

He found himself listening to every opening door, and already, as it were, gazing at Marcella in her white array. He was not asked to this ball. As he had early explained to Miss Boyce, he and Miss Raeburn had been 'cuts' for years, for what reason he had of course left Marcella to guess. As if Marcella found any difficulty in guessing—as if the preposterous bigotries and intolerances of the Ladies' League were not enough to account for any similar behaviour on the part of any similar high-bred spinster! As for this occasion, she was far too proud both on her own behalf and Wharton's to say anything either to Lord Maxwell or his sister on the subject of an invitation for her father's guest.

It so happened, however, that Wharton was aware of certain other reasons for his social exclusion from Maxwell Court. There was no necessity, of course, for enlightening Miss Boyce on the point. But as he sat waiting for her, Wharton's mind went back to the past connected with those reasons. In that past Raeburn

had had the whip-hand of him; Raeburn had been the moral superior dictating indignant terms to a young fellow detected in flagrant misconduct. Wharton did not know that he bore him any particular grudge. But he had never liked Aldous, as a boy, that he could remember; naturally he had liked him less since that old affair. The remembrance of it had made his position at Mellor particularly sweet to him from the beginning; he was not sure that it had not determined his original acceptance of the offer made to him by the Liberal Committee to contest old Dodgson's seat. And during the past few weeks the exhilaration and interest of the general position—considering all things—had been very great. Not only was he on the point of ousting the Maxwell candidate from a seat which he had held securely for years—Wharton was perfectly well aware by now that he was trespassing on Aldous Raeburn's preserves in ways far more important, and infinitely more irritating! He and Raeburn had not met often at Mellor during these weeks of fight. Each had been too busy. But whenever they had come across each other Wharton had clearly perceived that his presence in the house, his growing intimacy with Marcella Boyce, the freemasonry of opinion between them, the interest she took in his contest, the village friendships they had in common, were all intensely galling to Aldous Raeburn.

The course of events, indeed, had lately produced in Wharton a certain excitement—recklessness even. He had come down into these parts to court 'the joy of

eventful living'—politically and personally. But the situation had proved to be actually far more poignant and personal than he had expected. This proud, crude, handsome girl—to her certainly it was largely due that the days had flown as they had. He was perfectly, one might almost say gleefully, aware that at the present moment it was he and not Aldous Raeburn who was intellectually her master. His mind flew back at first with amusement, then with a thrill of something else, over their talks and quarrels. He smiled gaily as he recalled her fits of anger with him, her remonstrances, appeals—and then her awkward inevitable submissions when he had crushed her with sarcasm or with facts. Ah! she would go to this ball to-night; Aldous Raeburn would parade her as his possession; but she would go with thoughts, ambitions, ideals, which, as they developed, would make her more and more difficult for a Raeburn to deal with. And in those thoughts and ambitions the man who had been her tormentor, teacher, and companion during six rushing weeks knew well that he already counted for much. He had cherished in her all those 'divine discontents' which were already there when he first knew her; taught her to formulate them, given her better reasons for them; so that by now she was a person with a far more defined and stormy will than she had been to begin with. Wharton did not particularly know why he should exult; but he did exult. At any rate, he was prodigiously tickled—entertained—by the whole position.

A step, a rustle outside—he hastily shut his book and listened.

The door opened, and Marcella came in—a white vision against the heavy blue of the walls. With her came, too, a sudden strong scent of flowers, for she carried a marvellous bunch of hot-house roses, Aldous's gift, which had just arrived by special messenger.

Wharton sprang up and placed a chair for her.

'I had begun to believe the ball only existed in my own imagination!' he said gaily. 'Surely you are very late.'

Then he saw that she looked disturbed.

'It was papa,' she said, coming to the fire, and looking down into it. 'It has been another attack of pain—not serious, mamma says; she is coming down directly. But I wonder why they come, and why he thinks himself so ill—do you know?' she added abruptly, turning to her companion.

Wharton hesitated, taken by surprise. During the past weeks, what with Mr. Boyce's confidence, and his own acuteness, he had arrived at a very shrewd notion of what was wrong with his host. But he was not going to enlighten the daughter.

'I should say your father wants a great deal of care—and is nervous about himself,' he said quietly. 'But he will get the care—and your mother knows the whole state of the case.'

'Yes, she knows,' said Marcella. 'I wish I did.'

And a sudden painful expression—of moral worry,

remorse—passed across the girl's face. Wharton knew that she had often been impatient of late with her father, and incredulous of his complaints. He thought he understood.

'One can often be of more use to a sick person if one is not too well acquainted with what ails them,' he said. 'Hope and cheerfulness are everything in a case like your father's. He will do well.'

'If he does he won't owe any of it——'

She stopped as impulsively as she had begun. 'To me,' she meant to have said; then had retreated hastily before her own sense of something unduly intimate and personal. Wharton stood quietly beside her, saying nothing, but receiving and soothing her self-reproach just as surely as though she had put it into words.

'You are crushing your flowers, I think,' he said suddenly.

And indeed her roses were dangling against her dress, as if she had forgotten all about them.

She raised them carelessly, but he bent to smell them, and she held them out.

'Summer!' he said, plunging his face into them with a long breath of sensuous enjoyment. 'How the year sweeps round in an instant! And all the effect of a little heat and a little money. Will you allow me a philosopher's remark?'

He drew back from her. His quick inquisitive but still respectful eye took in every delightful detail.

'If I don't give you leave, my experience is that you will take it!' she said, half laughing, half resentful, as though she had old aggressions in mind.

'You admit the strength of the temptation? It is very simple, no one could help making it. To be spectator of the *height* of anything—the best, the climax—makes any mortal's pulses run. Beauty, success, happiness, for instance?'

He paused smiling. She leant a thin hand on the mantelpiece and looked away; Aldous's pearls slipped backwards along her white arm.

'Do you suppose to-night will be the height of happiness?' she said at last with a little scorn. 'These functions don't present themselves to *me* in such a light.'

Wharton could have laughed out—her pedantry was so young and unconscious. But he restrained himself.

'I shall be with the majority to-night,' he said demurely. 'I may as well warn you.'

Her colour rose. No other man had ever dared to speak to her with this assurance, this cool scrutinising air. She told herself to be indignant; the next moment she *was* indignant, but with herself, for remembering conventionalities.

'Tell me one thing,' said Wharton, changing his tone wholly. 'I know you went down hurriedly to the village before dinner. Was anything wrong?'

'Old Patton is very ill,' she said, sighing. 'I went

to ask after him; he may die any moment. And the Hurds' boy too.'

He leant against the mantelpiece, talking to her about both cases with a quick incisive common-sense—not unkind, but without a touch of unnecessary sentiment, still less of the superior person—which represented one of the moods she liked best in him. In speaking of the poor he always took the tone of comradeship, of a plain equality, and the tone was, in fact, genuine.

'Do you know,' he said presently, 'I did not tell you before, but I am certain that Hurd's wife is afraid of you, that she has a secret from you?'

'From me! how could she? I know every detail of their affairs.'

'No matter. I listened to what she said that day, in the cottage when I had the boy on my knee. I noticed her face, and I am quite certain. She has a secret, and above all a secret from you.'

Marcella looked disturbed for a moment, then she laughed.

'Oh, no!' she said, with a little superior air. 'I assure you I know her better than you.'

Wharton said no more.

'Marcella!' called a distant voice from the hall.

The girl gathered up her white skirts and her flowers in haste.

'Good night!'

'Good night! I shall hear you come home and wonder how you have sped. One word, if I may!

Take your *rôle* and play it. There is nothing subjects dislike so much as to see royalty decline its part.'

She laughed, blushed, a little proudly and uncertainly, and went without reply. As she shut the door behind her, a sudden flatness fell upon her. She walked through the dark Stone Parlour outside, seeing still the firmly-knit lightly-made figure—boyish, middle-sized, yet never insignificant—the tumbled waves of fair hair, the eyes so keenly blue, the face with its sharp mocking lines, its powers of sudden charm. Then self-reproach leapt, and possessed her. She quickened her pace, hurrying into the hall, as though from something she was ashamed or afraid of.

In the hall a new sensation awaited her. Her mother, fully dressed, stood waiting by the old billiard-table for her maid, who had gone to fetch her a cloak.

Marcella stopped an instant in surprise and delight, then ran up to her. 'Mamma, how *lovely* you look! I haven't seen you like that, not since I was a child. I remember you then once, in a low dress, a white dress, with flowers, coming into the nursery. But that black becomes you so well, and Deacon has done your hair beautifully!'

She took her mother's hand and kissed her cheek, touched by an emotion which had many roots. There was infinite relief in this tender natural outlet; she seemed to recover possession of herself.

Mrs. Boyce bore the kiss quietly. Her face was a

little pinched and white. But the unusual display Deacon had been allowed to make of her pale golden hair, still long and abundant; the unveiling of the shapely shoulders and neck, little less beautiful than her daughter's; the elegant lines of the velvet dress, all these things had very nobly transformed her. Marcella could not restrain her admiration and delight. Mrs. Boyce winced, and, looking upward to the gallery, which ran round the hall, called Deacon impatiently.

'Only, mamma,' said Marcella discontentedly, 'I don't like that little chain round your neck. It is not equal to the rest, not worthy of it.'

'I have nothing else, my dear,' said Mrs. Boyce, drily. 'Now, Deacon, don't be all night!'

Nothing else? Yet, if she shut her eyes, Marcella could perfectly recall the diamonds on the neck and arms of that white figure of her childhood—could see herself as a baby playing with the treasures of her mother's jewel-box.

Nowadays, Mrs. Boyce was very secretive and reserved about her personal possessions. Marcella never went into her room unless she was asked, and would never have thought of treating it or its contents with any freedom.

The mean chain which went so ill with the costly hoarded dress—it recalled to Marcella all the inexorable silent miseries of her mother's past life, and all the sordid disadvantages and troubles of her own youth. She followed Mrs. Boyce out to the carriage in silence—

once more in a tumult of sore pride and doubtful feeling.

Four weeks to her wedding-day! The words dinned in her ears as they drove along. Yet they sounded strange to her, incredible almost. How much did she know of Aldous, of her life that was to be—above all, how much of herself? She was not happy—had not been happy or at ease for many days. Yet in her restlessness she could think nothing out. Moreover, the chain that galled and curbed her was a chain of character. In spite of her modernness, and the complexity of many of her motives, there were certain inherited simplicities of nature at the bottom of her. In her wild demonic childhood you could always trust Marcie Boyce, if she had given you her word—her schoolfellows knew that. If her passions were half-civilised and southern, her way of understanding the point of honour was curiously English, sober, tenacious. So now. Her sense of bond to Aldous had never been in the least touched by any of her dissatisfactions and revolts. Yet it rushed upon her to-night with amazement, and that in four weeks she was going to marry him! Why? how?—what would it really *mean* for him and for her? It was as though in mid-stream she were trying to pit herself for an instant against the current which had so far carried them all on, to see what it might be like to retrace a step, and could only realise with dismay the force and rapidity of the water.

Yet all the time another side of her was well aware that she was at that moment the envy of half a county, that in another ten minutes hundreds of eager and critical eyes would be upon her; and her pride was rising to her part. The little incident of the chain had somehow for the moment made the ball and her place in it more attractive to her.

They had no sooner stepped from their carriage than Aldous, who was waiting in the outer hall, joyously discovered them. Till then he had been walking aimlessly amid the crowd of his own guests, wondering when she would come, how she would like it. This splendid function had been his grandfather's idea; it would never have entered his own head for a moment. Yet he understood his grandfather's wish to present his heir's promised bride in this public ceremonious way to the society of which she would some day be the natural leader. He understood, too, that there was more in the wish than met the ear; that the occasion meant to Lord Maxwell, whether Dick Boyce were there or no, the final condoning of things past and done with, a final throwing of the Maxwell shield over the Boyce weakness, and full adoption of Marcella into her new family.

All this he understood and was grateful for. But how would *she* respond? How would she like it —this parade that was to be made of her—these people that must be introduced to her? He was full of anxieties.

Yet in many ways his mind had been easier of late. During the last week she had been very gentle and good to him—even Miss Raeburn had been pleased with her. There had been no quoting of Wharton when they met; and he had done his philosopher's best to forget him. He trusted her proudly, intensely; and in four weeks she would be his wife.

'Can you bear it?' he said to her in a laughing whisper as she and her mother emerged from the cloak-room.

'Tell me what to do,' she said, flushing. 'I will do my best. What a crowd! Must we stay very long?'

'Ah, my dear Mrs. Boyce,' cried Lord Maxwell, meeting them on the steps of the inner quadrangular corridor—'Welcome indeed! Let me take you in. Marcella! with Aldous's permission!' he stooped his white head gallantly and kissed her on the cheek—'Remember I am an old man; if I choose to pay you compliments, you will have to put up with them!'

Then he offered Mrs. Boyce his arm, a stately figure in his ribbon and cross of the Bath. A delicate red had risen to that lady's thin cheek in spite of her self-possession. 'Poor thing,' said Lord Maxwell to himself as he led her along—'poor thing!—how distinguished and charming still! One sees to-night what she was like as a girl.'

Aldous and Marcella followed. They had to pass along the great corridor which ran round the quadrangle of the house. The antique marbles which lined

it were to-night masked in flowers. and seats covered in red had been fitted in wherever it was possible, and were now crowded with dancers 'sitting out.' From the ball-room ahead came waves of waltz-music; the ancient house was alive with colour and perfume, with the sounds of laughter and talk, lightly fretting and breaking the swaying rhythms of the band. Beyond the windows of the corridor, which had been left uncurtained because of the beauty of the night, the stiff Tudor garden with its fountains, which filled up the quadrangle, was gaily illuminated under a bright moon; and amid all the varied colour of lamps, drapery, dresses, faces, the antique heads ranged along the walls of the corridor—here Marcus Aurelius, there Trajan, there Seneca—and the marble sarcophagi which broke the line at intervals, stood in cold, whitish relief.

Marcella passed along on Aldous's arm, conscious that people were streaming into the corridor from all the rooms opening upon it, and that every eye was fixed upon her and her mother. 'Look, there she is,' she heard in an excited girl's voice as they passed Lord Maxwell's library, now abandoned to the crowd like all the rest. 'Come, quick! There—I told you she was lovely!'

Every now and then some old friend, man or woman, rose smiling from the seats along the side, and Aldous introduced his bride.

'On her dignity!' said an old hunting squire to his daughter when they had passed. 'Shy, no doubt—

very natural! But nowadays girls, when they're shy, don't giggle and blush as they used to in *my* young days; they look as if you meant to insult them, and they weren't going to allow it! Oh, very handsome—very handsome—of course. But you can see she's advanced—peculiar—or what d'ye call it?—woman's rights, I suppose, and all that kind of thing? Like to see you go in for it, Nettie, eh!'

'She's *awfully* handsome,' sighed his pink-cheeked, insignificant little daughter, still craning her neck to look—'very simply dressed too, except for those lovely pearls. She does her hair very oddly, so low down—in those plaits. Nobody does it like that nowadays.'

'That's because nobody has such a head,' said her brother, a young Hussar lieutenant, beside her, in the tone of connoisseurship. 'By George, she's ripping—she's the best-looking girl I've seen for a good long time. But she's a Tartar, I'll swear—looks it, anyway.'

'Everyone says she has the most extraordinary opinions,' said the girl eagerly. 'She'll manage him, don't you think? I'm sure he's very meek and mild.'

'Don't know that,' said the young man, twisting his moustache with the air of exhaustive information. 'Raeburn's a very good fellow—excellent fellow—see him shooting, you know—that kind of thing. I expect he's got a will when he wants it. The mother's handsome, too, and looks a lady. The father's kept out of the way, I see. Rather a blessing for the Raeburns.

Can't be pleasant, you know, to get a man like that in the family. Look after your spoons—that kind of thing.'

Meanwhile Marcella was standing beside Miss Raeburn, at the head of the long ball-room, and doing her best to behave prettily. One after another she bowed to, or shook hands with, half the magnates of the county—the men in pink, the women in the new London dresses, for which this brilliant and long-expected ball had given so welcome an excuse. They knew little or nothing of her, except that she was clearly good-looking, that she was that fellow Dick Boyce's daughter, and was reported to be 'odd.' Some, mostly men, who said their conventional few words to her, felt an amused admiration for the skill and rapidity with which she had captured the *parti* of the county; some, mostly women, were already jealous of her. A few of the older people here and there, both men and women—but after all they shook hands like the rest!—knew perfectly well that the girl must be going through an ordeal, were touched by the signs of thought and storm in the face, and looked back at her with kind eyes.

But of these last Marcella realised nothing. What she was saying to herself was that, if they knew little of her, she knew a great deal of many of them. In their talks over the Stone Parlour fire she and Wharton had gone through most of the properties, large and small, of his division, and indeed of the divisions round, by

the help of the knowledge he had gained in his canvass, together with a blue-book—one of the numberless!—recently issued, on the state of the midland labourer. He had abounded in anecdote, sarcasm, reflection, based partly on his own experiences, partly on his endless talks with the working-folk, now in the public-house, now at their own chimney-corner. Marcella, indeed, had a large unsuspected acquaintance with the county before she met it in the flesh. She knew that a great many of these men who came and spoke to her were doing their best according to their lights, that improvements were going on, that times were mending. But there were abuses enough still, and the abuses were far more vividly present to her than the improvements. In general, the people who thronged these splendid rooms were to her merely the incompetent members of a useless class. The nation would do away with them in time! Meanwhile it might at least be asked of them that they should practise their profession of landowning, such as it was, with greater conscience and intelligence—that they should not shirk its opportunities or idle them away. And she could point out those who did both—scandalously, intolerably. Once or twice she thought passionately of Minta Hurd, washing and mending all day, in her damp cottage; or of the Pattons in 'the parish house,' thankful after sixty years of toil for a hovel where the rain came through the thatch, and where the smoke choked you, unless, with the thermometer below freezing-point, you opened the door to the

blast. Why should *these* people have all the gay clothes, the flowers, the jewels, the delicate food—all the delight and all the leisure? And those, nothing! Her soul rose against what she saw as she stood there, going through her part. Wharton's very words, every inflection of his voice was in her ears, playing chorus to the scene.

But when these first introductions, these little empty talks of three or four phrases apiece, and all of them alike, were nearly done with, Marcella looked eagerly round for Mary Harden. There she was, sitting quietly against the wall in a remote corner, her plain face all smiles, her little feet dancing under the white muslin frock which she had fashioned for herself with so much pain under Marcella's directions. Miss Raeburn was called away to find an arm-chair for some dowager of importance; Marcella took advantage of the break and of the end of a dance to hurry down the room to Mary. Aldous, who was talking to old Sir Charles Leven, Frank's father, a few steps off, nodded and smiled to her as he saw her move.

'Have you been dancing, Mary?' she said severely.

'I wouldn't for worlds! I never was so much amused in my life. Look at those girls—those sisters—in the huge velvet sleeves, like coloured balloons!—and that old lady in the pink tulle and diamonds.—I do so want to get her her cloak! *And* those Lancers!—I never could have imagined people danced like that. They didn't dance them—they romped them! It wasn't beautiful—was it?'

'Why do you expect an English crowd to do anything beautiful? If we could do it, we should be too ashamed.'

'But it *is* beautiful, all the same, you scornful person!' cried Mary, dragging her friend down beside her. 'How pretty the girls are! And as for the diamonds, I never saw anything so wonderful. I wish I could have made Charles come!'

'Wouldn't he?'

'No'—she looked a little troubled—'he couldn't think it would be quite right. But I don't know—a sight like this takes me off my feet, shakes me up, and does *me* a world of good!'

'You dear, simple thing!' said Marcella, slipping her hand into Mary's as it lay on the bench.

'Oh, you needn't be so superior!' cried Mary,—'not for another year at least. I don't believe you are much more used to it than I am!'

'If you mean,' said Marcella, 'that I was never at anything so big and splendid as this before, you are quite right.'

And she looked round the room with that curious, cold air of personal detachment from all she saw, which had often struck Mary, and to-night made her indignant.

'Then enjoy it!' she said, laughing and frowning at the same time. 'That's a much more plain duty for *you* than it was for Charles to stay at home—there! Haven't you been dancing?'

'No, Mr. Raeburn doesn't dance. But he thinks he can get through the next Lancers if I will steer him.'

'Then I shall find a seat where I can look at you,' said Mary decidedly. 'Ah, there is Mr. Raeburn coming to introduce somebody to you. I knew they wouldn't let you sit here long.'

Aldous brought up a young Guardsman, who boldly asked Miss Boyce for the pleasure of a dance. Marcella consented; and off they swept into a room which was only just beginning to fill for the new dance, and where, therefore, for the moment the young grace of both had free play. Marcella had been an indefatigable dancer in the old London days at those students' parties, with their dyed gloves and lemonade suppers, which were running in her head now, as she swayed to the rhythm of this perfect band. The mere delight in movement came back to her; and while they danced, she danced with all her heart. Then in the pauses she would lean against the wall beside her partner, and rack her brain to find a word to say to him. As for anything that *he* said, every word—whether of Ascot, or the last Academy, or the new plays, or the hunting and the elections—sounded to her more vapid than the last.

Meanwhile Aldous stood near Mary Harden and watched the dancing figure. He had never seen her dance before. Mary shyly stole a look at him from time to time.

'Well,' he said at last, stooping to his neighbour, 'what are you thinking of?'

'I think she is a dream!' said Mary, flushing with the pleasure of being able to say it. They were great friends, he and she, and to-night somehow she was not a bit afraid of him.

Aldous's eye sparkled a moment; then he looked down at her with a kind smile.

'If you suppose I am going to let you sit here all night, you are very much mistaken. Marcella gave me precise instructions. I am going off this moment to find somebody.'

'Mr. Raeburn—don't!' cried Mary, catching at him. But he was gone, and she was left in trepidation, imagining the sort of formidable young man who was soon to be presented to her, and shaking at the thought of him.

When the dance was over Marcella returned to Miss Raeburn, who was standing at the door into the corridor and had beckoned to her. She went through a number of new introductions, and declared to herself that she was doing all she could. Miss Raeburn was not so well satisfied.

'Why can't she smile and chatter like other girls?' thought Aunt Neta impatiently. It's her "ideas," I suppose. What rubbish! There, now—just see the difference!'

For at the moment Lady Winterbourne came up, and instantly Marcella was all smiles and talk, holding her friend by both hands, clinging to her almost.

'Oh, do come here!' she said, leading her into a corner. 'There's such a crowd, and I say all the wrong

things. There!' with a sigh of relief. 'Now I feel myself protected.'

'I mustn't keep you,' said Lady Winterbourne, a little taken aback by her effusion. 'Everybody is wanting to talk to you.'

'Oh, I know! There is Miss Raeburn looking at me severely already. But I must do as I like a little.'

'You ought to do as Aldous likes,' said Lady Winterbourne suddenly, in her deepest and most tragic voice. It seemed to her a moment had come for admonition, and she seized it hastily.

Marcella stared at her in surprise. She knew by now that when Lady Winterbourne looked most forbidding she was in reality most shy. But still she was taken aback.

'Why do you say that, I wonder?' she asked, half reproachfully. 'I have been behaving myself quite nicely—I have indeed; at least, as nicely as I knew how.'

Lady Winterbourne's tragic air yielded to a slow smile.

'You look very well, my dear. That white becomes you charmingly; so do the pearls. I don't wonder that Aldous always knows where you are.'

Marcella raised her eyes and caught those of Aldous fixed upon her from the other side of the room. She blushed, smiled slightly, and looked away.

'Who is that tall man just gone up to speak to him?' she asked of her companion.

'That is Lord Wandle,' said Lady Winterbourne, 'and his plain second wife behind him. Edward always scolds me for not admiring him. He says women know nothing at all about men's looks, and that Lord Wandle was the most splendid man of his time. But I always think it an unpleasant face.

'Lord Wandle!' exclaimed Marcella, frowning. 'Oh, *please* come with me, dear Lady Winterbourne! I know he is asking Aldous to introduce him, and I won't—no I will *not*—be introduced to him.'

And, laying hold of her astonished companion, she drew her hastily through a doorway near, walked quickly, still gripping her, through two connected rooms beyond, and finally landed her and herself on a sofa in Lord Maxwell's library, pursued meanwhile through all her hurried course by the curious looks of an observant throng.

'That man!—no, that would really have been *too* much!' said Marcella, using her large feather fan with stormy energy.

'What *is* the matter with you, my dear?' said Lady Winterbourne in her amazement; 'and what is the matter with Lord Wandle?'

'You must know!' said Marcella indignantly. 'Oh, you *must* have seen that case in the paper last week—that *shocking* case! A woman and two children died in one of his cottages of blood-poisoning—nothing in the world but his neglect—his *brutal* neglect!' Her breast heaved; she seemed almost on the point of

weeping. 'The agent was appealed to—did nothing. Then the clergyman wrote to him direct, and got an answer. The answer was published. For cruel insolence, I never saw anything like it! He ought to be in prison for manslaughter—and he comes *here*! And people laugh and talk with him!'

She stopped, almost choked by her own passion. But the incident, after all, was only the spark to the mine.

Lady Winterbourne stared at her helplessly.

'Perhaps it isn't true,' she suggested. 'The newspapers put in so many lies, especially about *us*—the landlords. Edward says one ought never to believe them. Ah, here comes Aldous.'

Aldous, indeed, with some perplexity on his brow, was to be seen approaching, looking for his betrothed. Marcella dropped her fan and sat erect, her angry colour fading into whiteness.

'My darling! I couldn't think what had become of you. May I bring Lord Wandle and introduce him to you? He is an old friend here, and my godfather. Not that I am particularly proud of the relationship,' he said, dropping his voice as he stooped over her. 'He is a soured, disagreeable fellow, and I hate many of the things he does. But it is an old tie, and my grandfather is tender of such things. Only a word or two; then I will get rid of him.'

'Aldous, I *can't*,' said Marcella, looking up at him. 'How could I? I saw that case. I must be rude to him.'

Aldous looked considerably disturbed.

'It was very bad,' he said slowly. 'I didn't know you had seen it. What shall I do? I promised to go back for him.'

'Lord Wandle—Miss Boyce!' said Miss Raeburn's sharp little voice behind Aldous. Aldous, moving aside in hasty dismay, saw his aunt, looking very determined, presenting her tall neighbour, who bowed low with old-fashioned deference to the girl on the sofa.

Lady Winterbourne looked with trepidation at Marcella. But the social instinct held, to some extent. Ninety-nine women can threaten a scene of the kind Lady Winterbourne dreaded, for one that can carry it through. Marcella wavered; then, with her most forbidding air, she made a scarcely perceptible return of Lord Wandle's bow.'

'Did you escape in here out of the heat?' he asked her. 'But I am afraid no one lets you escape to-night. The occasion is too interesting.'

Marcella made no reply. Lady Winterbourne threw in a nervous remark on the crowd.

'Oh, yes, a great crush,' said Lord Wandle. 'Of course, we all come to see Aldous happy. How long is it, Miss Boyce, since you settled at Mellor?'

'Six months.'

She looked straight before her and not at him as she answered, and her tone made Miss Raeburn's blood boil.

Lord Wandle—a battered, coarsened, but still mag-

nificent-looking man of sixty—examined the speaker an instant from half-shut eyes, then put up his hand to his moustache with a half-smile.

'You like the country?'

'Yes.'

As she spoke her reluctant monosyllable, the girl had really no conception of the degree of hostility expressed in her manner. Instead she was hating herself for her own pusillanimity.

'And the people?'

'Some of them.'

And straightway she raised her fierce black eyes to his, and the man before her understood, as plainly as anyone need understand, that, whoever else Miss Boyce might like, she did not like Lord Wandle, and wished for no more conversation with him.

Her interrogator turned to Aldous with smiling *aplomb*.

'Thank you, my dear Aldous. Now let me retire. No one must *monopolise* your charming lady.'

And again he bowed low to her, this time with an ironical emphasis not to be mistaken, and walked away.

Lady Winterbourne saw him go up to his wife, who had followed him at a distance, and speak to her roughly with a frown. They left the room, and presently, through the other door of the library which opened on the corridor, she saw them pass, as though they were going to their carriage.

Marcella rose. She looked first at Miss Raeburn—then at Aldous.

'Will you take me away?' she said, going up to him; 'I am tired—take me to your room.'

He put her hand inside his arm, and they pushed their way through the crowd. Outside in the passage they met Hallin. He had not seen her before, and he put out his hand. But there was something distant in his gentle greeting which struck at this moment like a bruise on Marcella's quivering nerves. It came across her that for some time past he had made no further advances to her; that his first eager talk of friendship between himself and her had dropped; that his *acceptance* of her into his world and Aldous's was somehow suspended—in abeyance. She bit her lip tightly and hurried Aldous along. Again the same lines of gay, chatting people along the corridor, and on either side of the wide staircase—greetings, introduction—a nightmare of publicity.

'Rather pronounced—to carry him off like that,' said a clergyman to his wife with a kindly smile, as the two tall figures disappeared along the upper gallery. 'She will have him all to herself before long.'

Aldous shut the door of his sitting-room behind them. Marcella quickly drew her hand out of his arm, and going forward to the mantelpiece rested both elbows upon it and hid her face.

He looked at her a moment in distress and astonish-

ment, standing a little apart. Then he saw that she was crying. The colour flooded into his face, and going up to her he took her hand, which was all she would yield him, and, holding it to his lips, said in her ear every soothing tender word that love's tutoring could bring to mind. In his emotion he told himself and her that he admired and loved her the more for the incident downstairs, for the temper she had shown! She alone among them all had had the courage to strike the true stern Christian note. As to the annoyance such courage might bring upon him and her in the future—even as to the trouble it might cause his own dear folk—what real matter? In these things she should lead.

What could love have asked better than such a moment? Yet Marcella's weeping was in truth the weeping of despair. This man's very sweetness to her, his very assumption of the right to comfort and approve her, roused in her a desperate stifled sense of bonds that should never have been made, and that now could not be broken. It was all plain to her at last. His touch had no thrill for her; his frown no terror. She had accepted him without loving him, coveting what he could give her. And now it seemed to her that she cared nothing for anything he could give!—that the life before her was to be one series of petty conflicts between her and a surrounding circumstance which must inevitably in the end be too strong for her, conflicts from which neither heart nor ambition could gain anything. She had desired a great position for what

she might do with it. But what could she do with it! She would be subdued—oh! very quickly!—to great houses and great people, and all the vapid pomp and idle toil of wealth. All that picture of herself, stooping from place and power, to bind up the wounds of the people, in which she had once delighted, was to her now a mere flimsy vulgarity. She had been shown other ideals—other ways—and her pulses were still swaying under the audacity—the virile inventive force of the showman. Everything she had once desired looked flat to her; everything she was not to have, glowed and shone. Poverty, adventure, passion, the joys of self-realisation—these she gave up. She would become Lady Maxwell, make friends with Miss Raeburn, and wear the family diamonds!

Then, in the midst of her rage with herself and fate, she drew herself away, looked up, and caught full the eyes of Aldous Raeburn. Conscience stung and burned. What was this life she had dared to trifle with—this man she had dared to treat as a mere pawn in her own game? She gave way utterly, appalled at her own misdoing, and behaved like a penitent child. Aldous, astonished and alarmed by her emotion and by the wild incoherent things she said, won his way at last to some moments of divine happiness, when, leaving her trembling hand in his, she sat submissively beside him, gradually quieting down, summoning back her smiles and her beauty, and letting him call her all the fond names he would.

CHAPTER VIII

SCARCELY a word was exchanged between Marcella and her mother on the drive home. Yet under ordinary circumstances Marcella's imagination would have found some painful exercise in the effort to find out in what spirit her mother had taken the evening—the first social festivity in which Richard Boyce's wife had taken part for sixteen years. In fact, Mrs. Boyce had gone through it very quietly. After her first public entry on Lord Maxwell's arm she had sat in her corner, taking keen note of everything, enjoying probably the humours of her kind. Several old acquaintances who had seen her at Mellor as a young wife in her first married years had come up with some trepidation to speak to her. She had received them with her usual well-bred indifference, and they had gone away under the impression that she regarded herself as restored to society by this great match that her daughter was making. Lady Winterbourne had been shyly and therefore formidably kind to her; and both Lord Maxwell and Miss Raeburn had been genuinely interested in smoothing the effort to her as much as they could.

She meanwhile watched Marcella—except through the encounter with Lord Wandle, which she did not see—and found some real pleasure in talking both to Aldous and to Hallin.

Yet all through she was preoccupied, and towards the end very anxious to get home, a state of mind which prevented her from noticing Marcella's changed looks after her reappearance with Aldous in the ball-room, as closely as she otherwise might have done. Yet the mother *had* observed that the end of Marcella's progress had been somewhat different from the beginning; that the girl's greetings had been gentler, her smiles softer; and that in particular she had taken some pains, some wistful pains, to make Hallin talk to her. Lord Maxwell—ignorant of the Wandle incident—was charmed with her, and openly said so, both to the mother and Lady Winterbourne, in his hearty old man's way. Only Miss Raeburn held indignantly aloof, and would not pretend, even to Mrs. Boyce.

And now Marcella was tired—dead tired, she said to herself, both in mind and body. She lay back in the carriage, trying to sink herself in her own fatigue, to forget everything, to think of nothing. Outside the night was mild, and the moon clear. For some days past, after the break up of the long frost, there had been heavy rain. Now the rain had cleared away, and in the air there was already an early promise of spring. As she walked home from the village that afternoon she had felt the buds and the fields stirring.

When they got home, Mrs. Boyce turned to her daughter at the head of the stairs, 'Shall I unlace your dress, Marcella?'

'Oh no, thank you. Can I help you?'

'No. Good night.'

'Mamma!' Marcella turned and ran after her. 'I should like to know how papa is. I will wait here if you will tell me.'

Mrs. Boyce looked surprised. Then she went into her room and shut the door. Marcella waited outside, leaning against the old oak gallery which ran round the hall, her candle the one spot of light and life in the great dark house.

'He seems to have slept well,' said Mrs. Boyce, reappearing, and speaking under her breath. 'He has not taken the opiate I left for him, so he cannot have been in pain. Good night.'

Marcella kissed her and went. Somehow, in her depression of nerve and will, she was loth to go away by herself. The loneliness of the night, and of her wing of the house, weighed upon her; the noises made by the old boards under her steps, the rustling draughts from the dark passages to right and left startled and troubled her; she found herself childishly fearing lest her candle should go out.

Yet, as she descended the two steps to the passage outside her door, she could have felt little practical need of it, for the moonlight was streaming in through its uncovered windows, not directly, but reflected from the

Tudor front of the house which ran at right angles to this passage, and was to-night a shining silver palace, every battlement, window, and moulding in sharpest light and shade under the radiance of the night. Beneath her feet, as she looked out into the Cedar Garden, was a deep triangle of shadow, thrown by that part of the building in which she stood; and beyond the garden the barred black masses of the cedars closing up the view lent additional magic to the glittering unsubstantial fabric of the moonlit house, which was, as it were, embosomed and framed among them. She paused a moment, struck by the strangeness and beauty of the spectacle. The Tudor front had the air of some fairy banqueting-hall lit by unearthly hands for some weird gathering of ghostly knights. Then she turned to her room, impatiently longing in her sick fatigue to be quit of her dress and ornaments and tumble into sleep.

Yet she made no hurry. She fell on the first chair that offered. Her candle behind her had little power over the glooms of the dark tapestried room, but it did serve to illuminate the lines of her own form, as she saw it reflected in the big glass of her wardrobe, straight in front of her. She sat with her hands round her knees, absently looking at herself, a white long-limbed apparition struck out of the darkness. But she was conscious of nothing save one mounting overwhelming passionate desire, almost a cry.

Mr. Wharton must go away—he *must*—or she could not bear it.

Quick alternations of insight, memory, self-recognition, self-surrender, rose and broke upon her. At last, physical weariness recalled her. She put up her hands to take off her pearls.

As she did so, she started, hearing a noise that made her turn her head. Just outside her door a little spiral staircase led down from her corridor to the one below, which ran at the back of the old library, and opened into the Cedar Garden at its further end.

Steps surely—light steps—along the corridor outside, and on the staircase. Nor did they die away. She could still hear them,—as she sat, arrested, straining her ears,—pacing slowly along the lower passage.

Her heart, after its pause, leapt into fluttering life. This room of hers, the two passages, the library, and the staircase, represented that part of the house to which the ghost stories of Mellor clung most persistently. Substantially the block of building was of early Tudor date, but the passages and the staircase had been alterations made with some clumsiness at the time of the erection of the eighteenth-century front, with a view to bringing these older rooms into the general plan. Marcella, however, might demonstrate as she pleased that the Boyce who was supposed to have stabbed himself on the staircase died at least forty years before the staircase was made. None the less, no servant would go alone, if she could help it, into either passage after dark; and there was much excited marvelling how Miss Boyce could sleep where she did. Deacon abounded

in stories of things spiritual and peripatetic, of steps, groans, lights in the library, and the rest. Marcella had consistently laughed at her.

Yet all the same she had made in secret a very diligent pursuit of this ghost, settling in the end to a certain pique with him that he would not show himself to so ardent a daughter of the house. She had sat up waiting for him; she had lingered in the corridor outside, and on the stairs, expecting him. By the help of a favourite carpenter she had made researches into roofs, water-pipes, panelling, and old cupboards, in the hope of finding a practical clue to him. In vain.

Yet here were the steps—regular, soft, unmistakable. The colour rushed back into her cheeks! Her eager healthy youth forgot its woes, flung off its weariness, and panted for an adventure, a discovery. Springing up, she threw her fur wrap round her again, and gently opened the door, listening.

For a minute, nothing—then a few vague sounds as of something living and moving down below—surely in the library? Then the steps again. Impossible that it should be anyone breaking in. No burglar would walk so leisurely. She closed her door behind her, and, gathering her white satin skirts about her, she descended the staircase.

The corridor below was in radiant moonlight, chequered by the few pieces of old furniture it contained, and the black and white of the old portrait prints hanging on the walls. At first her seeking,

excited eyes could make out nothing. Then in a flash they perceived the figure of Wharton at the further end near the garden door, leaning against one of the windows. He was apparently looking out at the moonlit house, and she caught the faint odour of a cigarette.

Her first instinct was to turn and fly. But Wharton had seen her. As he looked about him at the sound of her approach, the moon, which was just rounding the corner of the house, struck on her full, amid the shadows of the staircase, and she heard his exclamation.

Dignity—a natural pride—made her pause. She came forward slowly—he eagerly.

'I heard footsteps,' she said, with a coldness under which he plainly saw her embarrassment. 'I could not suppose that anybody was still up, so I came down to see.'

He was silent a moment, scanning her with laughing eyes. Then he shook his head. 'Confess you took me for the ghost?' he said.

She hesitated; then must laugh too. She herself had told him the stories, so that his guess was natural.

'Perhaps I did,' she said. 'One more disappointment! Good night.'

He looked after her a quick undecided moment as she made a step in front of him, then at the half-burnt cigarette he held in his hand, threw the end away with a hasty gesture, overtook her and walked beside her along the corridor.

'I heard you and your mother come in,' he said, as

though explaining himself. 'Then I waited till I thought you must both be asleep, and came down here to look at that wonderful effect on the old house.' He pointed to the silver palace outside. 'I have a trick of being sleepless—a trick, too, of wandering at night. My own people know it, and bear with me, but I am abashed that you should have found me out. Just tell me—in one word—how the ball went.'

He paused at the foot of the stairs, his hands on his sides, as keenly wide-awake as though it were three o'clock in the afternoon instead of three in the morning.

Womanlike, her mood instantly shaped itself to his.

'It went very well,' she said perversely, putting her satin-slippered foot on the first step. 'There were six hundred people upstairs, and four hundred coachmen and footmen downstairs, according to our man. Everybody said it was splendid.'

His piercing enigmatic gaze could not leave her. As he had often frankly warned her, he was a man in quest of sensations. Certainly, in this strange meeting with Aldous Raeburn's betrothed, in the midst of the sleep-bound house, he had found one. Her eyes were heavy, her cheek pale. But in this soft vague light—white arms and neck now hidden, now revealed by the cloak she had thrown about her glistening satin—she was more enchanting than he had ever seen her. His breath quickened.

He said to himself that he would make Miss Boyce stay and talk to him. What harm—to her or to

Raeburn? Raeburn would have chances enough before long. Why admit his monopoly before the time? She was not in love with him! As to Mrs. Grundy—absurd! What in the true reasonableness of things was to prevent human beings from conversing by night as well as by day?

'One moment'—he said, delaying her. 'You must be dead tired—too tired for romance. Else I should say to you, turn aside an instant and look at the library. It is a sight to remember.'

Inevitably she glanced behind her, and saw that the library door was ajar. He flung it open, and the great room showed wide, its high domed roof lost in shadow, while along the bare floor and up the latticed books crept, here streaks and fingers, and there wide breadths of light from the unshuttered and curtainless windows.

'Isn't it the very poetry of night and solitude?' he said, looking in with her. 'You love the place; but did you ever see it so lovable? The dead are here; you did right to come and seek them! Look at your namesake, in that ray. To-night she lives! She knows that is her husband opposite—those are her books beside her. And the rebel!'—he pointed smiling to the portrait of John Boyce. 'When you are gone I shall shut myself up here—sit in his chair, invoke him—and put my speech together. I am nervous about to-morrow (he was bound, as she knew, to a large Labour Congress in the Midlands, where he was to preside),

and sleep will make no terms with me. Ah!—how strange! Who can that be passing the avenue?'

He made a step or two into the room, and put up his hand to his brow, looking intently. Involuntarily, yet with a thrill, Marcella followed. They walked to the window.

'It is *Hurd*!' she cried in a tone of distress, pressing her face against the glass. 'Out at this time, and with a gun! Oh, dear, dear!'

There could be no question that it was Hurd. Wharton had seen him linger in the shadowy edge of the avenue, as though reconnoitring, and now, as he stealthily crossed the moonlit grass, his slouching dwarf's figure, his large head, and the short gun under his arm, were all plainly visible.

'What do you suppose he is after?' said Wharton, still gazing, his hands in his pockets.

'I don't know; he wouldn't poach on *our* land; I'm sure he wouldn't! Besides, there is nothing to poach.'—Wharton smiled.—'He must be going, after all, to Lord Maxwell's coverts! They are just beyond the avenue, on the side of the hill. Oh! it is too disappointing! Can we do anything?'

She looked at her companion with troubled eyes. This incursion of something sadly and humanly real seemed suddenly to have made it natural to be standing beside him there at that strange hour. Her conscience was soothed.

Wharton shook his head.

'I don't see what we could do. How strong the instinct is! I told you that woman had a secret. Well, it is only one form—the squalid peasant's form—of the same instinct which sends the young fellows of our class ruffling it and chancing it all over the world. It is the instinct to take one's fling, to get out of the rut, to claim one's innings against the powers that be—Nature, or the law, or convention.'

'I know all that—I never blame them!'—cried Marcella—'but just now it is so monstrous—so dangerous! Westall specially alert—and this gang about! Besides, I got him work from Lord Maxwell, and made him promise me—for the wife and children's sake.'

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

'I should think Westall is right, and that the gang have got hold of him. It is what always happens. The local man is the catspaw.—So you are sorry for him—this man?' he said in another tone, facing round upon her.

She looked astonished, and drew herself up nervously, turning at the same time to leave the room. But before she could reply he hurried on:

'He—may escape his risk. Give your pity, Miss Boyce, rather to one—who has not escaped!'

'I don't know what you mean,' she said, unconsciously laying a hand on one of the old chairs beside her to steady herself. 'But it is too late to talk. Good night, Mr. Wharton.'

'Good-bye,' he said quietly, yet with a low emphasis, at the same time moving out of her path. She stopped, hesitating. Beneath the lace and faded flowers on her breast he could see how her heart beat.

'Not good-bye? You are coming back after the meeting?'

'I think not. I must not inflict myself—on Mrs. Boyce—any more. You will all be very busy during the next three weeks. It would be an intrusion if I were to come back at such a time—especially—considering the fact'—he spoke slowly—'that I am as distasteful as I now know myself to be, to your future husband. Since you all left to-night the house has been very quiet. I sat over the fire thinking. It grew clear to me. I must go, and go at once. Besides—a lonely man as I am must not risk his nerve. His task is set him, and there are none to stand by him if he fails.'

She trembled all over. Weariness and excitement made normal self-control almost impossible.

'Well, then, I must say thank you,' she said indistinctly, 'for you have taught me a great deal.'

'You will unlearn it!' he said gaily, recovering his self-possession, so it seemed, as she lost hers. 'Besides, before many weeks are over you will have heard hard things of me. I know that very well. I can say nothing to meet them. Nor should I attempt anything. It may sound brazen, but that past of mine, which I can see perpetually present in Aldous Raeburn's mind, for instance, and which means so much to

his good aunt, means to me just nothing at all! The doctrine of identity must be true—I must be the same person I was then. But, all the same, what I did then does not matter a straw to me now. To all practical purposes I am another man. I was then a youth, idle, *désœuvré*, playing with all the keys of life in turn. I have now unlocked the path that suits me. Its quest has transformed me—as I believe, ennobled me. I do not ask Raeburn or anyone else to believe it. It is my own affair. Only, if we ever meet again in life, you and I, and you think you have reason to ask humiliation of me, do not ask it, do not expect it. The man you will have in your mind has nothing to do with me. I will not be answerable for his sins.'

As he said these things he was leaning lightly forward, looking up at her, his arms resting on the back of one of the old chairs, one foot crossed over the other. The attitude was easy calm itself. The tone—indomitable, analytic, reflective—matched it. Yet, all the same, her woman's instinct divined a hidden agitation, and, woman-like, responded to that and that only.

'Mr. Raeburn will never tell me old stories about anybody,' she said proudly. 'I asked him once, out—out of curiosity—about you, and he would tell me nothing.'

'Generous!' said Wharton, drily. 'I am grateful.'

'No!' cried Marcella, indignantly, rushing blindly at the outlet for emotion. 'No!—you are not grateful;

you are always judging him harshly—criticising, despising what he does.'

Wharton was silent a moment. Even in the moonlight she could see the reddening of his cheek.

'So be it,' he said at last. 'I submit. You must know best. But you? are you always content? Does this *milieu* into which you are passing always satisfy you? To-night, did your royalty please you? Will it soon be enough for you?'

'You know it is not enough,' she broke out, hotly; 'it is insulting that you should ask in that tone. It means that you think me a hypocrite!—and I have given you no cause——'

'Good heavens, no!' he exclaimed, interrupting her, and speaking in a low, hurried voice. 'I had no motive, no reason for what I said—none—but this, that you are going—that we are parting. I spoke in gibes to make you speak—somehow to strike—to reach you. To-morrow it will be too late!'

And before, almost, she knew that he had moved, he had stooped forward, caught a fold of her dress, pressed it to his lips, and dropped it.

'Don't speak,' he said brokenly, springing up, and standing before her in her path. 'You shall forgive me—I will compel it! See! here we are on this moonlit space of floor, alone, in the night. Very probably we shall never meet again, except as strangers. Put oft convention, and speak to me, soul to soul! You are not happy altogether in this marriage. I know it.

You have as good as confessed it. Yet you will go through with it. You have given your word—your honour holds you. I recognise that it holds you. I say nothing, not a syllable, against your bond! But here, to-night, tell me, promise me that you will make this marriage of yours serve *our* hopes and ends, the ends that you and I have foreseen together—that it shall be your instrument, not your chain. We have been six weeks together. You say you have learnt from me; you have! you have given me your mind, your heart to write on, and I have written. Henceforward you will never look at life as you might have done if I had not been here. Do you think I triumph, that I boast? Ah!' he drew in his breath—'What if in helping you, and teaching you—for I have helped and taught you!—I have undone myself? What if I came here the slave of impersonal causes, of ends not my own? What if I leave—maimed—in face of the battle? Not your fault? No, perhaps not! but, at least, you owe me some gentleness now, in these last words—some kindness in farewell.'

He came closer, held out his hands. With one of her own she put his back, and lifted the other dizzily to her forehead.

'Don't come near me!' she said, tottering. 'What is it? I cannot see. Go!'

And guiding herself, as though blindfold, to a chair, she sank upon it, and her head dropped. It was the natural result of a moment of intense excitement

coming upon nerves already strained and tried to their utmost. She fought desperately against her weakness; but there was a moment when all around her swam, and she knew nothing.

Then came a strange awakening. What was this room, this weird light, these unfamiliar forms of things, this warm support against which her cheek lay? She opened her eyes languidly. They met Wharton's half in wonder. He was kneeling beside her, holding her. But for an instant she realised nothing except his look, to which her own helplessly replied.

'Once!' she heard him whisper. 'Once! Then nothing more—for ever.'

And stooping, slowly, deliberately, he kissed her.

In a stinging flow, life, shame, returned upon her. She struggled to her feet, pushing him from her.

'You dared,' she said, '*dared* such a thing!'

She could say no more; but her attitude, fiercely instinct, through all her physical weakness, with her roused best self was speech enough. He did not venture to approach her. She walked away. He heard the door close, hurrying steps on the little stairs, then silence.

He remained where she had left him, leaning against the latticed wall for some time. When he moved it was to pick up a piece of maidenhair which had dropped from her dress.

'That was a scene!' he said, looking at it, and at the trembling of his own hand. 'It carries one back to

the days of the Romantics. Was I Alfred de Musset?—and she George Sand? Did any of them ever taste a more poignant moment than I—when she—lay upon my breast? To be helpless—yet yield nothing—it challenged me! Yet I took no advantage—none. When she *looked*—when her eye, her *soul*, was, for that instant, mine, then!—Well!—the world has rushed with me since I saw her on the stairs; life can bring me nothing of such a quality again. What did I say?—how much did I mean? My God! how can I tell? I began as an actor, did I finish as a man?'

He paced up and down, thinking; gradually, by the the help of an iron will quieting down each rebellious pulse.

'That poacher fellow did me a good turn. *Dare!* the word galled. But, after all, what woman could say less? And what matter? I have held her in my arms, in a setting—under a moon—worthy of her. Is not life enriched thereby beyond robbery? And what harm? Raeburn is not injured. *She* will never tell—and neither of us will ever forget. Ah!—what was that?'

He walked quickly to the window. What he had heard had been a dull report coming apparently from the woods beyond the eastern side of the avenue. As he reached the window it was followed by a second.

'That poacher's gun?—no doubt!'—he strained his eyes in vain.—'Collision perhaps—and mischief? No matter! I have nothing to do with it. The world is

all lyric for me to-night. I can hear in it no other rhythm.'

The night passed away. When the winter morning broke, Marcella was lying with wide sleepless eyes, waiting and pining for it. Her candle still burnt beside her; she had had no courage for darkness, nor the smallest desire for sleep. She had gone through shame and anguish. But she would have scorned to pity herself. Was it not her natural, inevitable portion?

'I will tell Aldous everything—*everything*,' she said to herself for the hundredth time, as the light penetrated. 'Was *that* only seven striking—*seven*—impossible!'

She sat up haggard and restless, hardly able to bear the thought of the hours that must pass before she could see Aldous—put all to the touch.

Suddenly she remembered Hurd—then old Patton.

'He was dying last night,' she thought, in her moral torment—her passion to get away from herself. 'Is he gone? This is the hour when old people die—the dawn. I will go and see—go at once.'

She sprang up. To baffle this ache within her by some act of repentance, of social amends, however small, however futile—to propitiate herself, if but by a hairbreadth—this, no doubt, was the instinct at work. She dressed hastily, glad of the cold, glad of the effort she had to make against the stiffness of her own young

bones—glad of her hunger and faintness, of everything physically hard that had to be fought and conquered.

In a very short time she had passed quietly downstairs and through the hall, greatly to the amazement of William, who opened the front door for her. Once in the village road the damp raw air revived her greatly. She lifted her hot temples to it, welcoming the waves of wet mist that swept along the road, feeling her youth come back to her.

Suddenly as she was nearing the end of a narrow bit of lane between high hedges, and the first houses of the village were in sight, she was stopped by a noise behind her—a strange unaccountable noise as of women's voices, calling and wailing. It startled and frightened her, and she stood in the middle of the road waiting.

Then she saw coming towards her two women running at full speed, crying and shouting, their aprons up to their faces.

'What is it? What is the matter?' she asked, going to meet them, and recognising two labourers' wives she knew.

'Oh! Miss—oh! Miss!' said the foremost, too wrapt up in her news to be surprised at the sight of her. 'They've just found him—they're bringin ov 'im home; they've got a shutter from Muster Wellin! 'im at Disley Farm. It wor close by Disley wood they found 'em. And there's one ov 'is men they've sent off ridin for the inspector—here he come, Miss! Come out o' th' way!'

They dragged her back, and a young labourer galloped past them on a farm colt, urging it on to its full pace, his face red and set.

'Who is found?' cried Marcella.—'What is it?'

'Westall, Miss—Lor bless you—Shot him in the head they did—blowed his brains right out—and Charlie Dynes—oh! he's knocked about shamful—the doctor don't give no hopes of him. Oh deary—deary me! And we're goin for Muster Harden—ee must tell the widder—or Miss Mary—none on us can!'

'And who did it?' said Marcella, pale with horror, holding her.

'Why, the poachers, Miss. Them as they've bin waitin for all along—and they do say as Jim Hurd's in it. Oh Lord, oh Lord!'

Marcella stood petrified, and let them hurry on.

CHAPTER IX

THE lane was still again, save for the unwonted sounds coming from the groups which had gathered round the two women, and were now moving beside them along the village street a hundred yards ahead.

Marcella stood in a horror of memory—seeing Hurd's figure cross the moonlit avenue, from dark to dark. Where was he? Had he escaped? Suddenly she set off running, stung by the thought of what might have already happened under the eyes of that unhappy wife, those wretched children.

As she entered the village, a young fellow ran up to her in breathless excitement. 'They've got 'im, Miss. He'd come straight home—'adn't made no attempt to run. As soon as Jenkins'—Jenkins was the policeman—'heared of it, ee went straight across to 'is house, an' caught 'im. Ee wor goin to make off—'is wife 'ad been persuadin ov 'im all night. But they've got him, Miss, sure enough!'

The lad's exultation was horrible. Marcella waved him aside and ran on. A man on horseback appeared on the road in front of her leading from Widrington to

the village. She recognised Aldous Raeburn, who had checked his horse in sudden amazement as he saw her talking to the boy.

'My darling! what are you here for? Oh! go home—go *home!*—out of this horrible business. They have sent for me as a magistrate. Dynes is alive—I *beg* you!—go home!'

She shook her head, out of breath and speechless with running. At the same moment she and he, looking to the right, caught sight of the crowd standing in front of Hurd's cottage.

A man ran out from it, seeing the horse and its rider.

'Muster Raeburn! Muster Raeburn! They've cotched 'im; Jenkins has got 'im.'

'Ah!' said Aldous, drawing a long, stern breath; 'he didn't try to get off then? Marcella!—you are not going there—to that house!'

He spoke in a tone of the strongest remonstrance. Her soul rose in anger against it.

'I am going to *her*,' she said panting; 'don't wait.'

And she left him and hurried on.

As soon as the crowd round the cottage saw her coming, they divided to let her pass.

'She's quiet now, Miss,' said a woman to her significantly, nodding towards the hovel. 'Just after Jenkins got in you could hear her crying out pitiful.'

'That was when they wor a-handcuffin him,' said a man beside her.

Marcella shuddered.

'Will they let me in?' she asked.

'They won't let none ov *us* in,' said the man. 'There's Hurd's sister,' and he pointed to a weeping woman supported by two others. 'They've kep her out. But here's the inspector, Miss; you ask him.'

The inspector, a shrewd officer of long experience, fetched in haste from a mile's distance, galloped up, and gave his horse to a boy.

Marcella went up to him.

He looked at her with sharp interrogation. 'You are Miss Boyce? Miss Boyce of Mellor?'

'Yes, I want to go to the wife; I will promise not to get in your way.'

He nodded. The crowd let them pass. The inspector knocked at the door, which was cautiously unlocked by Jenkins, and the two went in together.

'She's a queer one,' said a thin, weasel-eyed man in the crowd to his neighbour. 'To think o' her bein in it—at this time o' day. You could see Muster Raeburn was a tellin of her to go 'ome. But she's allus pampered them Hurds.'

The speaker was Ned Patton, old Patton's son, and Hurd's companion on many a profitable night-walk. It was barely a week since he had been out with Hurd on another ferreting expedition, some of the proceeds of which were still hidden in Patton's outhouse. But at the present moment he was one of the keenest of the crowd, watching eagerly for the moment

when he should see his old comrade come out, trapped and checkmated, bound safely and surely to the gallows. The natural love of incident and change which keeps life healthy had been starved in him by his labourer's condition. This sudden excitement had made a brute of him.

The man next him grimaced, and took his pipe out of his mouth a moment.

'*She* won't be able to do nothin for 'im! Ther isn't a man nor boy in this 'ere place as didn't know as ee hated Westall like pison, an would be as like as not to do for 'im some day. That'll count agen 'im now terrible strong! Ee wor allus one to blab, ee wor.'

'Well, an' Westall said jus as much!' struck in another voice; 'theer wor sure to be a fight iv ever Westall got at 'im—on the job. You see—they may bring it in manslarter after all.'

''Ow does anyone know ee wor there at all? who seed him?' inquired a white-haired elderly man, raising a loud quavering voice from the middle of the crowd.

'Charlie Dynes seed 'im,' cried several together.

'How do yer know ee seed 'im?'

From the babel of voices which followed the white-haired man slowly gathered the beginnings of the matter. Charlie Dynes, Westall's assistant, had been first discovered by a horsekeeper in Farmer Wellin's employment as he was going to his work. The lad had been found under a hedge, bleeding and frightfully injured, but still alive. Close beside him was the dead body

of Westall with shot-wounds in the head. On being taken to the farm and given brandy, Dynes was asked if he had recognised anybody. He had said there were five of them, 'town chaps'; and then he had named Hurd quite plainly—whether anybody else, nobody knew. It was said he would die, and that Mr. Raeburn had gone to take his deposition.

'An' them town chaps got off, eh?' said the elderly man.

'Clean!' said Patton, refilling his pipe. 'Trust them!'

Meanwhile, inside this poor cottage Marcella was putting out all the powers of the soul. As the door closed behind her and the inspector, she saw Hurd sitting handcuffed in the middle of the kitchen, watched by a man whom Jenkins, the local policeman, had got in to help him, till some more police should arrive. Jenkins was now upstairs searching the bedroom. The little bronchitic boy sat on the fender, in front of the untidy fireless grate, shivering, his emaciated face like a yellowish white mask, his eyes fixed immovably on his father. Every now and then he was shaken with coughing, but still he looked—with the dumb devoted attention of some watching animal.

Hurd, too, was sitting silent. His eyes, which seemed wider open and more brilliant than usual, wandered restlessly from thing to thing about the room; his great earth-stained hands in their fetters

twitched every now and then on his knee. Haggard and dirty as he was, there was a certain aloofness, a dignity even, about the misshapen figure which struck Marcella strangely. Both criminal and victim may have it—this dignity. It means that a man feels himself set apart from his kind.

Hurd started at sight of Marcella. 'I want to speak to her,' he said, hoarsely, as the inspector approached him—'to that lady'—nodding towards her.

'Very well,' said the inspector; 'only it is my duty to warn you that anything you say now will be taken down and used as evidence at the inquest.'

Marcella came near. As she stood in front of him, one trembling ungloved hand crossed over the other, the diamond in her engagement ring catching the light from the window sparkled brightly, diverting even for the moment the eyes of the little fellow against whom her skirts were brushing.

'Ee might ha killed me just as well as I killed 'im,' said Hurd, bending over to her and speaking with difficulty from the dryness of his mouth. 'I didn't mean nothink o' what happened. He and Charlie came on us round Disley wood. He didn't take no notice o' them. It was they as beat Charlie. But he come straight on at me—all in a fury—a blackguardin ov me, with his stick up. I thought he was for beatin my brains out, an I up with my gun and fired. We was so close—that was how he got it all in the head. But ee might a killed me just as well.'

He paused, staring at her with a certain anguished intensity, as though he were watching to see how she took it—nay, trying its effect both on her and himself. He did not look afraid or cast down—nay, there was a curious buoyancy and steadiness about his manner for the moment which astonished her. She could almost have fancied that he was more alive, more of a *man* than she had ever seen him—mind and body better fused, more at command.

'Is there anything more you wish to say to me?' she asked him, after waiting.

Then suddenly his manner changed. Their eyes met. Hers, with all their subtle inheritance of various expression, their realised character, as it were, searched his, tried to understand them—those peasant eyes, so piercing to her strained sense in their animal urgency and shame. *Why* had he done this awful thing?—deceived her—wrecked his wife?—that was what her look asked. It seemed to her too *childish*—too *stupid* to be believed.

'I haven't made nobbut a poor return to *you*, Miss,' he said in a shambling way, as though the words were dragged out of him. Then he threw up his head again. 'But I didn't mean nothink o' what happened,' he repeated, doggedly going off again into a rapid yet, on the whole, vivid and consecutive account of Westall's attack, to which Marcella listened, trying to remember every word.

'Keep that for your solicitor,' the inspector said at

last, interrupting him; 'you are only giving pain to Miss Boyce. You had better let her go to your wife.'

Hurd looked steadily once more at Marcella. 'It be a bad end I'm come to,' he said, after a moment. 'But I thank you kindly all the same. *They'll* want seein after.' He jerked his head towards the boy, then towards the outhouse or scullery where his wife was. 'She takes it terr'ble hard. She wanted me to run. But I said, "No, I'll stan it out." Mr. Brown at the Court 'll give you the bit wages he owes me. But they'll have to go on the Union. Everybody 'll turn their backs on them now.'

'I will look after them,' said Marcella, 'and I will do the best I can for you. Now I will go to Mrs. Hurd.'

Minta Hurd was sitting in a corner of the outhouse on the clay floor, her head leaning against the wall. The face was turned upward, the eyes shut, the mouth helplessly open. When Marcella saw her, she knew that the unhappy woman had already wept so much in the hours since her husband came back to her that she could weep no more. The two little girls in the scantiest of clothing, half-fastened, sat on the floor beside her, shivering and begrimed—watching her. They had been crying at the tops of their voices, but were now only whimpering miserably, and trying at intervals to dry their tear-stained cheeks with the skirts of their frocks. The baby, wrapped in an old shawl, lay on its mother's knee, asleep and unheeded. The little lean-to

place, full of odds and ends of rubbish, and darkened overhead by a string of damp clothes—was intolerably cold in the damp February dawn. The children were blue; the mother felt like ice as Marcella stooped to touch her. Outcast misery could go no further.

The mother moaned as she felt Marcella's hand, then started wildly forward, straining her thin neck and swollen eyes that she might see through the two open doors of the kitchen and the outhouse.

'They're not taking him away?' she said fiercely. 'Jenkins swore to me they'd give me notice.'

'No, he's still there,' said Marcella, her voice shaking. 'The inspector's come. You shall have notice.'

Mrs. Hurd recognised her voice, and looked up at her in amazement.

'You must put this on,' said Marcella, taking off the short fur cape she wore. 'You are perished. Give me the baby, and wrap yourself in it.'

But Mrs. Hurd put it away from her with a vehement hand.

'I'm not cold, Miss—I'm burning hot. He made me come in here. He said he'd do better if the children and I ud go away a bit. An' I couldn't go upstairs, because—because——' she hid her face on her knees.

Marcella had a sudden sick vision of the horrors this poor creature must have gone through since her husband had appeared to her, splashed with the blood of his enemy, under that same marvellous moon which——

Her mind repelled its own memories with haste.

Moreover, she was aware of the inspector standing at the kitchen door and beckoning to her. She stole across to him so softly that Mrs. Hurd did not hear her.

'We have found all we want,' he said in his official tone, but under his breath—'the clothes anyway. We must now look for the gun. Jenkins is first going to take him off to Widrington. The inquest will be held to-morrow here, at "The Green Man." We shall bring him over.' Then he added in another voice, touching his hat, 'I don't like leaving you, Miss, in this place. Shall Jenkins go and fetch somebody to look after that poor thing? They'll be all swarming in here as soon as we've gone.'

'No, I'll stay for a while. I'll look after her. They won't come if I'm here. Except his sister—Mrs. Mullins—she may come in, of course, if she wants.'

The inspector hesitated.

'I'm going now to meet Mr. Raeburn, Miss. I'll tell him that you're here.'

'He knows,' said Marcella briefly. 'Now are you ready?'

He signed assent, and Marcella went back to the wife.

'Mrs. Hurd,' she said, kneeling on the ground beside her, 'they're going.'

The wife sprang up with a cry and ran into the kitchen, where Hurd was already on his feet between Jenkins and another policeman, who were to

convey him to the gaol at Widrington. But when she came face to face with her husband something—perhaps the nervous appeal in his strained eyes—checked her, and she controlled herself piteously. She did not even attempt to kiss him. With her eyes on the ground, she put her hand on his arm. 'They'll let me come and see you, Jim?' she said, trembling.

'Yes; you can find out the rules,' he said shortly. 'Don't let them children cry. They want their breakfast to warm them. There's plenty of coal. I brought a sack home from Jellaby's last night myself. Goodbye.'

'Now, march,' said the inspector sternly, pushing the wife back.

Marcella put her arm round the shaking woman. The door opened, and beyond the three figures as they passed out, her eye passed to the waiting crowd, then to the misty expanse of common and the dark woods behind, still wrapped in fog.

When Mrs. Hurd saw the rows of people waiting within a stone's throw of the door she shrank back. Perhaps it struck her, as it struck Marcella, that every face was the face of a foe. Marcella ran to the door as the inspector stepped out, and locked it after him. Mrs. Hurd, hiding herself behind a bit of baize curtain, watched the two policemen mount with Hurd into the fly that was waiting, and then followed it with her eyes along the bit of straight road, uttering sounds the while of low anguish, which wrung the heart in Marcella's

breast. Looking back in after days it always seemed to her that for this poor soul the true parting, the true wrench between life and life, came at this moment.

She went up to her, her own tears running over.

'You must come and lie down,' she said, recovering herself as quickly as possible. 'You and the children are both starved, and you will want your strength if you are to help him. I will see to things.'

She put the helpless woman on the wooden settle by the fireplace, rolling up her cloak to make a pillow.

'Now, Willie, you sit by your mother. Daisy, where's the cradle? Put the baby down and come and help me make the fire.'

The dazed children did exactly as they were told, and the mother lay like a log on the settle. Marcella found coal and wood under Daisy's guidance, and soon lit the fire, piling on the fuel with a lavish hand. Daisy brought her water, and she filled the kettle and set it on to boil, while the little girl, still sobbing at intervals like some little weeping automaton, laid the breakfast. Then the children all crouched round the warmth, while Marcella rubbed their cold hands and feet, and 'mothered' them. Shaken as she was with emotion and horror, she was yet full of a passionate joy that this pity, this tendance was allowed to her. The crushing weight of self-contempt had lifted. She felt morally free and at ease.

Already she was revolving what she could do for Hurd. It was as clear as daylight to her that there had

been no murder but a free fight—an even chance between him and Westall. The violence of a hard and tyrannous man had provoked his own destruction—so it stood, for her passionate protesting sense. That at any rate must be the defence, and some able man must be found to press it. She thought she would write to the Cravens and consult them. Her thoughts carefully avoided the names both of Aldous Raeburn and of Wharton.

She was about to make the tea when someone knocked at the door. It proved to be Hurd's sister, a helpless woman, with a face swollen by crying, who seemed to be afraid to come into the cottage, and afraid to go near her sister-in-law. Marcella gave her money, and sent her for some eggs to the neighbouring shop, then told her to come back in half an hour and take charge. She was an incapable, but there was nothing better to be done. 'Where is Miss Harden?' she asked the woman. The answer was that ever since the news came to the village the rector and his sister had been with Mrs. Westall and Charlie Dynes' mother. Mrs. Westall had gone into fit after fit; it had taken two to hold her, and Charlie's mother, who was in bed recovering from pneumonia, had also been very bad.

Again Marcella's heart contracted with rage rather than pity. Such wrack and waste of human life, moral and physical! for what? For the protection of a hateful sport which demoralised the rich and their agents, no less than it tempted and provoked the poor!

When she had fed and physically comforted the children, she went and knelt down beside Mrs. Hurd, who still lay with closed eyes in heavy-breathing stupor.

'Dear Mrs. Hurd,' she said, 'I want you to drink this tea and eat something.'

The half-stupefied woman signed refusal. But Marcella insisted.

'You have got to fight for your husband's life,' she said firmly, 'and to look after your children. I must go in a very short time, and before I go you must tell me all that you can of this business. Hurd would tell you to do it. He knows and you know that I am to be trusted. I want to save him. I shall get a good lawyer to help him. But first you must take this—and then you must talk to me.'

The habit of obedience to a 'lady,' established long ago in years of domestic service, held. The miserable wife submitted to be fed, looked with forlorn wonder at the children round the fire, and then sank back with a groan. In her tension of feeling Marcella for an impatient moment thought her a poor creature. Then with quick remorse she put her arms tenderly round her, raised the dishevelled grey-streaked head on her shoulder and, stooping, kissed the marred face, her own lips quivering.

'You are not alone,' said the girl with her whole soul. 'You shall never be alone while I live. Now tell me.'

She made the white and gasping woman sit up in a corner of the settle, and she herself got a stool and established herself a little way off, frowning, self-contained, and determined to make out the truth.

'Shall I send the children upstairs?' she asked.

'No!' said the boy suddenly, in his husky voice, shaking his head with energy, 'I'm not a goin.'

'Oh! he's safe—is Willie,' said Mrs. Hurd, looking at him, but strangely, and as it were from a long distance, 'and the others is too little.'

Then gradually Marcella got the story out of her—first, the misery of alarm and anxiety in which she had lived ever since the Tudley End raid, owing first to her knowledge of Hurd's connection with it, and with the gang that had carried it out; then to her appreciation of the quick and ghastly growth of the hatred between him and Westall; lastly, to her sense of ingratitude towards those who had been kind to them.

'I knew we was acting bad towards you. I told Jim so. I couldn't hardly bear to see you come in. But there, Miss,—I couldn't do anything. I tried, oh! the Lord knows I tried! There was never no happiness between us at last, I talked so. But I don't believe he could help himself—he's not made like other folks, isn't Jim——'

Her features became convulsed again with the struggle for speech. Marcella reached out for the toil-disfigured hand that was fingering and clutching

at the edge of the settle, and held it close. Gradually she made out that although Hurd had not been able of course to conceal his night absences from his wife, he had kept his connection with the Oxford gang absolutely dark from her, till, in his wild exultation over Westall's discomfiture in the Tudley End raid, he had said things in his restless snatches of sleep which had enabled her to get the whole truth out of him by degrees. Her reproaches, her fears, had merely angered and estranged him; her nature had had somehow to accommodate itself to his, lest affection should lose its miserable all.

As to this last fatal attack on the Maxwell coverts, it was clear to Marcella, as she questioned and listened, that the wife had long foreseen it, and that she now knew much more about it than—suddenly—she would allow herself to say. For in the midst of her outpourings she drew herself together, tried to collect and calm herself, looked at Marcella with an agonised, suspicious eye, and fell silent.

'I don't know nothing about it, Miss,' she stubbornly declared at last, with an inconsequent absurdity which smote Marcella's pity afresh. 'How am I to know? There was seven o' them Oxford fellows at Tudley End—that I know. Who's to say as Jim was with 'em at all last night? Who's to say as it wasn't them as——'

She stopped, shivering. Marcella held her reluctant hand.

'You don't know,' she said quietly, 'that I saw

your husband in here for a minute before I came in to you, and that he told me, as he had already told Jenkins, that it was in a struggle with him that Westall was shot, but that he had fired in self-defence because Westall was attacking him. You don't know, too, that Charlie Dynes is alive, and says he saw Hurd——'

'Charlie Dynes!' Mrs. Hurd gave a shriek, and then fell to weeping and trembling again, so that Marcella had need of patience.

'If you can't help me more,' she said at last in despair, 'I don't know what we shall do. Listen to me. Your husband will be charged with Westall's murder. That I am sure of. He says it was not murder—that it happened in a fight. I believe it. I want to get a lawyer to prove it. I am your friend—you know I am. But if you are not going to help me by telling me what you know of last night, I may as well go home—and get your sister-in-law to look after you and the children.'

She rose as she spoke. Mrs. Hurd clutched at her.

'Oh, my God!' she said, looking straight before her vacantly at the children, who at once began to cry again. '*Oh, my God!* Look here, Miss'—her voice dropped, her swollen eyes fixed themselves on Marcella—the words came out in a low, hurried stream—'It was just after four o'clock I heard that door turn; I got up in my nightgown and ran down, and there was Jim.

"Put that light out," he says to me, sharp like. "Oh, Jim," says I, "wherever have you been? You'll be the death o' me and them poor children!" "You go to bed," says he to me, "and I'll come presently." But I could see him, 'cos of the moon, almost as plain as day, an' I couldn't take my eyes off him. And he went about the kitchen so strange like, puttin down his hat and takin it up again, an' I saw he hadn't got his gun. So I went up an' caught holt on him. An' he gave me a push back. "Can't you let me alone?" he says; "you'll know soon enough." An' then I looked at my sleeve where I'd touched him—oh, my God! my God!'

Marcella, white to the lips and shuddering too, held her tight. She had the *seeing* faculty which goes with such quick, nervous natures, and she saw the scene as though she had been there—the moonlit cottage, the miserable husband and wife, the life-blood on the woman's sleeve.

Mrs. Hurd went on in a torrent of half-finished sentences and fragments of remembered talk. She told her husband's story of the encounter with the keepers as he had told it to her, of course with additions and modifications already struck out by the agony of inventive pain; she described how she had made him take his blood-stained clothes and hide them in a hole in the roof; then how she had urged him to strike across country at once and get a few hours' start before the ghastly business was known. But the

more he talked to her the more confident he became of his own story, and the more determined to stay and brave it out. Besides, he was shrewd enough to see that escape for a man of his deformity was impossible, and he tried to make her understand it so. But she was mad and blind with fear, and at last, just as the light was coming in, he told her roughly, to end their long wrestle, that he should go to bed and get some sleep. She would make a fool of him, and he should want all his wits. She followed him up the steep ladder to their room, weeping. And there was little Willie sitting up in bed, choking with the phlegm in his throat, and half dead of fright because of the voices below.

'And when Hurd see him, he went and cuddled him up, and rubbed his legs and feet to warm them, an' I could hear him groanin. And I says to him, "Jim, if you won't go for my sake, will you go for the boy's?" For you see, Miss, there was a bit of money in the house, an' I thought he'd hide himself by day and walk by night, and so get to Liverpool perhaps, and off to the States. An' it seemed as though my head would burst with listenin for people comin, and him taken up there like a rat in a trap, an' no way of provin the truth, and everybody agen him, because of the things he'd said. And he burst out a cryin, an' Willie cried. An' I came an' entreated of him. An' he kissed me; an' at last he said he'd go. An' I made haste, the light was getting so terrible strong; an' just as he'd got to the foot of the

stairs, an' I was holding little Willie in my arms an' saying good-bye to him——'

She let her head sink against the settle. There was no more to say, and Marcella asked no more questions—she sat thinking. Willie stood, a wasted worn figure, by his mother, stroking her face; his hoarse breathing was for a time the only sound in the cottage.

Then Marcella heard a loud knock at the door. She got up and looked through the casement window. The crowd had mostly dispersed, but a few people stood about on the green, and a policeman was stationed outside the cottage. On the steps stood Aldous Raeburn, his horse held behind him by a boy.

She went and opened the door.

'I will come,' she said at once. 'There—I see Mrs. Mullins crossing the common. Now I can leave her.'

Aldous, taking off his hat, closed the door behind him, and stood with his hand on Marcella's arm, looking at the huddled woman on the settle, at the pale children. There was a solemnity in his expression, a mixture of judgment and pity which showed that the emotion of other scenes also—scenes through which he had just passed—was entering into it.

'Poor unhappy souls,' he said slowly, under his breath. 'You say that you have got someone to see after her. She looks as though it might kill her, too.'

Marcella nodded. Now that her task, for the moment, was nearly over, she could hardly restrain herself nervously or keep herself from crying. Aldous

observed her with disquiet as she put on her hat. His heart was deeply stirred. She had chosen more nobly for herself than he would have chosen for her, in thus daring an awful experience for the sake of mercy. His moral sense, exalted and awed by the sight of death, approved, worshipped her. His man's impatience pined to get her away, to cherish and comfort her. Why, she could hardly have slept three hours since they parted on the steps of the Court, amidst the crowd of carriages!

Mrs. Mullins came in still scared and weeping, and dropping frightened curtseys to 'Muster Raeburn.' Marcella spoke to her a little in a whisper, gave some counsels which filled Aldous with admiration for the girl's practical sense and thoughtfulness, and promised to come again later. Mrs. Hurd neither moved nor opened her eyes.

'Can you walk?' said Aldous, bending over her, as they stood outside the cottage. 'I can see that you are worn out. Could you sit my horse if I led him?'

'No, let us walk.'

They went on together, followed by the eyes of the village, the boy leading the horse some distance behind.

'Where have you been?' said Marcella when they had passed the village. 'Oh, *please* don't think of my being tired! I had so much rather know it all. I must know it all.'

She was deathly pale, but her black eyes flashed

impatience and excitement. She even drew her hand out of the arm where Aldous was tenderly holding it, and walked on erect by herself.

'I have been with poor Dynes,' said Aldous sadly; 'we had to take his deposition. He died while I was there.'

'He died?'

'Yes. The fiends who killed him had left small doubt of that. But he lived long enough, thank God, to give the information which will, I think, bring them to justice!'

The tone of the magistrate and the magnate goaded Marcella's quivering nerves.

'What is justice?' she cried; 'the system that wastes human lives in protecting your tame pheasants?'

A cloud came over the stern clearness of his look. He gave a bitter sigh—the sigh of the man to whom his own position in life had been, as it were, one long scruple.

'You may well ask that!' he said. 'You cannot imagine that I did not ask it of myself a hundred times as I stood by that poor fellow's bedside.'

They walked on in silence. She was hardly appeased. There was a deep, inner excitement in her urging her towards difference, towards attack. At last he resumed:—

'But whatever the merits of our present game system may be, the present case is surely clear—horribly clear. Six men, with at least three guns

among them, probably more, go out on a pheasant-stealing expedition. They come across two keepers, one a lad of seventeen, who have nothing but a light stick apiece. The boy is beaten to death, the keeper shot dead at the first brush by a man who has been his life-long enemy, and threatened several times in public to "do for him." If that is not brutal and deliberate murder, it is difficult to say what is!'

Marcella stood still in the misty road trying to command herself.

'It was *not* deliberate,' she said at last with difficulty; 'not in Hurd's case. I have heard it all from his own mouth. It was a *struggle*—he might have been killed instead of Westall—Westall attacked, Hurd defended himself.'

Aldous shook his head.

'Of course Hurd would tell you so,' he said sadly, 'and his poor wife. He is not a bad or vicious fellow, like the rest of the rascally pack. Probably when he came to himself, after the moment of rage, he could not simply believe what he had done. But that makes no difference. It was murder; no judge or jury could possibly take any other view. Dynes' evidence is clear, and the proof of motive is overwhelming.'

Then, as he saw her pallor and trembling, he broke off in deep distress. 'My dear one, if I could but have kept you out of this!'

They were alone in the misty road. The boy with the horse was out of sight. He would fain have put

his arm round her, have consoled and supported her. But she would not let him.

'Please understand,' she said in a sort of gasp, as she drew herself away, 'that I do *not* believe Hurd is guilty—that I shall do my very utmost to defend him. He is to me the victim of unjust, abominable laws! If *you* will not help me to protect him—then I must look to someone else.'

Aldous felt a sudden stab of suspicion—presentiment.

'Of course he will be well defended; he will have every chance; that you may be sure of,' he said slowly.

Marcella controlled herself, and they walked on. As they entered the drive of Mellor, Aldous thought passionately of those divine moments in his sitting-room, hardly yet nine hours old. And now—*now!*—she walked beside him as an enemy.

The sound of a step on the gravel in front of them made them look up. Past, present, and future met in the girl's bewildered and stormy sense as she recognised Wharton.

CHAPTER X

THE first sitting of the Birmingham Labour Congress was just over, and the streets about the hall in which it had been held were beginning to fill with the issuing delegates. Rain was pouring down and umbrellas were plentiful.

Harry Wharton, accompanied by a group of men, left the main entrance of the hall,—releasing himself with difficulty from the friendly crowd about the doors—and crossed the street to his hotel.

'Well, I'm glad you think I did decently,' he said, as they mounted the hotel stairs. 'What a beastly day, and how stuffy that hall was! Come in and have something to drink.'

He threw open the door of his sitting-room as he spoke. The four men with him followed him in.

'I must go back to the hall to see two or three men before everybody disperses,' said the one in front. 'No refreshment for me, thank you, Mr. Wharton. But I want to ask a question—what arrangements have you made for the reporting of your speech?'

The man who spoke was thin and dark, with a

modest kindly eye. He wore a black frock coat, and had the air of a minister.

'Oh, thank you, Bennett, it's all right. The *Post*, the *Chronicle*, and the *Northern Guardian* will have full copies. I sent them off before the meeting. And my own paper, of course. As to the rest they may report it as they like. I don't care.'

'They'll all have it,' said another man bluntly. 'It's the best speech you've ever made—the best president's speech we've had yet, I say,—don't you think so?'

The speaker, a man called Casey, turned to the two men behind him. Both nodded.

'Hallin's speech last year was first-rate,' he continued, 'but somehow Hallin damps you down, at least he did me last year; what you want just now is *fight*—and, my word! Mr. Wharton let 'em have it!'

And standing with his hands on his sides, he glanced round from one to another. His own face was flushed, partly from the effects of a crowded hall and bad air, but mostly with excitement. All the men present indeed—though it was less evident in Bennett and Wharton than in the rest—had the bright nervous look which belongs to leaders keenly conscious of standing well with the led, and of having just emerged successfully from an agitating ordeal. As they stood together they went over the speech to which they had been listening, and the scene which had followed it, in a running stream of talk, laughter, and gossip. Wharton took little part, except

to make a joke occasionally at his own expense, but the pleasure on his smiling lip, and in his roving, contented eye was not to be mistaken. The speech he had just delivered had been first thought out as he paced the moonlit library and corridor at Mellor. After Marcella had left him, and he was once more in his own room, he had had the extraordinary self-control to write it out, and make two or three machine-copies of it for the press. Neither its range nor its logical order had suffered for that intervening experience. The programme of labour for the next five years had never been better presented, more boldly planned, more eloquently justified. Hallin's presidential speech of the year before, as Casey said, rang flat in the memory when compared with it. Wharton knew that he had made a mark, and knew also that his speech had given him the whip-hand of some fellows who would otherwise have stood in his way.

Casey was the first man to cease talking about the speech. He had already betrayed himself about it more than he meant. He belonged to the New Unionism, and affected a costume in character—fustian trousers, flannel shirt, a full red tie and workman's coat, all well calculated to set off a fine lion-like head and broad shoulders. He had begun life as a bricklayer's labourer, and was now the secretary of a recently formed Union. His influence had been considerable, but was said to be already on the wane; though it was thought likely that he would win a seat in the coming Parliament.

The other two men were Molloy, secretary to the congress, short, smooth-faced and wiry, a man whose pleasant eye and manner were often misleading, since he was in truth one of the hottest fighting men of a fighting movement; and Wilkins, a friend of Casey's, ex-iron-worker, Union official, and Labour candidate for a Yorkshire division—an uneducated, passionate fellow, speaking with a broad, Yorkshire accent, a bad man of affairs, but honest, and endowed with the influence which comes of sincerity, together with a gift for speaking and superhuman powers of physical endurance.

'Well, I'm glad it's over,' said Wharton, throwing himself into a chair with a long breath, and at the same time stretching out his hand to ring the bell. 'Casey, some whisky? No? Nor you, Wilkins? nor Molloy? As for you, Bennett, I know it's no good asking you. By George! our grandfathers would have thought us a poor lot! Well, some coffee at any rate you must all of you have before you go back. Waiter! coffee. By the way, I have been seeing something of Hallin, Bennett, down in the country.'

He took out his cigarette case as he spoke, and offered it to the others. All refused except Molloy. Casey took his half-smoked pipe out of his pocket and lit up. He was not a teetotaler as the others were, but he would have scorned to drink his whisky and water at the expense of a 'gentleman' like Wharton, or to smoke the 'gentleman's' cigarettes. His class-pride was irritably strong. Molloy, who was by nature

anybody's equal, took the cigarette with easy good manners, which made Casey look at him askance.

Mr. Bennett drew his chair close to Wharton's. The mention of Hallin had roused a look of anxiety in his quick dark eyes.

'How is he, Mr. Wharton? The last letter I had from him he made light of his health. But you know he only just avoided a breakdown in that strike business. We only pulled him through by the skin of his teeth—Mr. Raeburn and I.'

'Oh, he's no constitution; never had, I suppose. But he seemed much as usual. He's staying with Raeburn, you know, and I've been staying with the father of the young lady whom Raeburn's going to marry.'

'Ah! I've heard of that,' said Bennett, with a look of interest. 'Well, Mr. Raeburn isn't on our side, but for judgment and fair dealing there are very few men of his class and circumstances I would trust as I would him. The lady should be happy.'

'Of course,' said Wharton drily. 'However, neither she nor Raeburn is very happy just at this moment. A horrible affair happened down there last night. One of Lord Maxwell's gamekeepers and a "helper," a lad of seventeen, were killed last night in a fight with poachers. I only just heard the outlines of it before I came away, but I got a telegram just before going into congress, asking me to defend the man charged with the murder.'

A quick expression of repulsion and disgust crossed Bennett's face.

'There has been a whole crop of such cases lately,' he said. 'How shall we ever escape from the *curse* of this game system?'

'We shan't escape it,' said Wharton quietly, knocking the end off his cigarette, 'not in your lifetime or mine. When we get more Radicals on the bench we shall lighten the sentences; but that will only exasperate the sporting class into finding new ways of protecting themselves. Oh! the man will be hanged—that's quite clear to me. But it will be a good case—from the public point of view—will work up well——'

He ran his hand through his curls, considering.

'Will work up admirably,' he added in a lower tone of voice, as though to himself, his eyes keen and brilliant as ever, in spite of the marks of sleeplessness and fatigue visible in the rest of the face, though only visible there since he had allowed himself the repose of his cigarette and arm-chair.

'Are yo comin to dine at the "Peterloo" to-night, Mr. Wharton?' said Wilkins, as Wharton handed him a cup of coffee; 'but it ull be part o' your duties—I'm thinkin?'

While Molloy and Casey were deep in animated discussion of the great meeting of the afternoon he had been sitting silent against the edge of the table—a short-bearded, sombre figure, ready at any moment to make a grievance, to suspect a slight.

'I'm afraid I can't,' said Wharton, bending forward and speaking in a tone of concern; 'that was just what I was going to ask you all—if you would make my excuses to-night? I have been explaining to Bennett. I have an important piece of business in the country—a labourer has been getting into trouble for shooting a keeper; they have asked me to defend him. The assizes come on in little more than a fortnight, worse luck! so that the time is short——'

And he went on to explain that, by taking an evening train back to Widrington, he could get the following (Saturday) morning with the solicitor in charge of the case, and be back in Birmingham, thanks to the convenience of a new line lately opened, in time for the second meeting of the congress, which was fixed for the early afternoon.

He spoke with great cordiality and persuasiveness. Among the men who surrounded him, his youth, his good looks and easy breeding shone out conspicuous. In the opinion of Wilkins, indeed, who followed his every word and gesture, he was far too well dressed and too well educated. A day would soon come when the labour movement would be able to show these young aristocrats the door. Not yet, however.

'Well, I thowt you wouldn't dine with us,' he said, turning away with a blunt laugh.

Bennett's mild eye showed annoyance. 'Mr. Wharton has explained himself very fully, I think,' he said,

turning to the others. 'We shall miss him at dinner—but this matter seems to be one of life and death. And we mustn't forget any way that Mr. Wharton is fulfilling this engagement at great inconvenience to himself. We none of us knew when we elected him last year that he would have to be fighting his election at the same time. Next Saturday, isn't it?'

Bennett rose as he spoke and carefully buttoned his coat. It was curious to contrast his position among his fellows—one of marked ascendency and authority—with his small, insignificant physique. He had a gentle deprecating eye, and the heart of a poet. He played the flute and possessed the gift of repeating verse—especially Ebenezer Eliot's Corn Law Rhymes—so as to stir a great audience to enthusiasm or tears. The Wesleyan community of his native Cheshire village owned no more successful class-leader, and no humbler Christian. At the same time he could hold a large business meeting sternly in check, was the secretary of one of the largest and oldest Unions in the country, had been in Parliament for years, and was generally looked upon even by the men who hated his 'moderate' policy, as a power not to be ignored.

'Next Saturday. Yes!' said Wharton, nodding in answer to his inquiry.

'Well, are you going to do it?' said Casey, looking round at him.

'Oh, yes!' said Wharton cheerfully; 'oh, yes! we shall do it. We shall settle old Dodgson, I think.'

'Are the Raeburns as strong as they were?' asked Molloy, who knew Brookshire.

'What landlord is? Since '84 the ground is mined for them all—good and bad—and they know it.'

'The mine takes a long time blowing up—too long for my patience,' said Wilkins gruffly. 'How the country can go on year after year paying its tribute to these plunderers passes my comprehension. But you may attack them as you please. You will never get any forrarder so long as Parliament and the Cabinet is made up of them and their hangers on.'

Wharton looked at him brightly, but silently, making a little assenting inclination of the head. He was not surprised that anything should pass Wilkins's comprehension, and he was determined to give him no opening for holding forth.

'Well, we'll let you alone,' said Bennett. 'You'll have very little time to get off in. We'll make your excuses, Mr. Wharton. You may be sure everybody is so pleased with your speech we shall find them all in a good temper. It was grand!—let me congratulate you again. Good-night—I hope you'll get your poacher off!'

The others followed suit, and they all took leave in character:—Molloy, with an eager business reference to the order of the day for Saturday,—'Give me your address at Widrington; I'll post you everything to-night, so that you may have it all under your eye;' Casey, with the off-hand patronage of the man who

would not for the world have his benevolence mistaken for servility; and Wilkins with as gruff a nod and as limp a shake of the hand as possible. It might perhaps have been read in the manner of the last two, that although this young man had just made a most remarkable impression, and was clearly destined to go far, they were determined not to yield themselves to him a moment before they must. In truth, both were already jealous of him; whereas Molloy, absorbed in the business of the congress, cared for nothing except to know whether in the next two days' debates Wharton would show himself as good a chairman as he was an orator; and Bennett, while saying no word that he did not mean, was fully conscious of an inner judgment, which pronounced five minutes of Edward Hallin's company to be worth more to him than anything which this brilliant young fellow could do or say.

Wharton saw them out, then came back and threw himself again into his chair by the window. The venetian blinds were not closed, and he looked out on a wide and handsome street of tall red-brick houses and shops, crowded with people and carriages, and lit with a lavishness of gas which overcame even the February dark and damp. But he noticed nothing, and even the sensation of his triumph was passing off. He was once more in the Mellor drive; Aldous Raeburn and Marcella stood in front of him; the thrill of the moment beat once more in his pulse.

He buried his head in his hands and thought. The news of the murder had reached him from Mr. Boyce. The master of Mellor had heard the news from William, the man-servant, at half-past seven, and had instantly knocked up his guest, by way of sharing the excitement with which his own feeble frame was throbbing.

'By Gad! I never heard such an *atrocious* business,' said the invalid, his thin hand shaking against his dressing-gown. 'That's what your Radical notions bring us to! We shall have them plundering and burning the country houses next.'

'I don't think my Radical notions have much to do with it,' said Wharton composedly.

But there was a red spot in his cheeks which belied his manner. So when he—*they*—saw Hurd cross the avenue he was on his way to this deed of blood. The shot that he, Wharton, had heard had been the shot which slew Westall? Probably. Well, what was the bearing of it? Could she keep her own counsel or would they find themselves in the witness box? The idea quickened his pulse amazingly.

'Any clue? Any arrests?' he asked of his host.

'Why, I told you,' said Boyce testily, though as a matter of fact he had said nothing. 'They have got that man Hurd. The ruffian has been a marked man by the keepers and police, they tell me, for the last year or more. And there's my daughter has been pampering him and his wife all the time, and *preach-*

ing to me about them! She got Raeburn even to take him on at the Court. I trust it will be a lesson to her.'

Wharton drew a breath of relief. So the man was in custody, and there was other evidence. Good! There was no saying what a woman's conscience might be capable of, even against her friends and herself.

When Mr. Boyce at last left him free to dress and make his preparations for the early train, by which the night before, after the ladies' departure for the ball, he had suddenly made up his mind to leave Mellor, it was some time before Wharton could rouse himself to action. The situation absorbed him. Miss Boyce's friend was now in imminent danger of his neck, and Miss Boyce's thoughts must be of necessity concentrated upon his plight, and that of his family. He foresaw the passion, the *sæva indignatio*, that she must ultimately throw—the general situation being what it was—into the struggle for Hurd's life. Whatever the evidence might be, he would be to her either victim, or champion—and Westall, of course, merely the Holofernes of the piece.

How would Raeburn take it? Ah, well! the situation must develop. It occurred to him, however, that he would catch an earlier train to Widrington than the one he had fixed on, and have half an hour's talk with a solicitor who was a good friend of his before going on to Birmingham. Accordingly, he rang for William—who came, all staring and dishevelled, fresh

from the agitation of the servants' hall—gave orders for his luggage to be sent after him, got as much fresh information as he could from the excited lad, plunged into his bath, and finally emerged, fresh and vigorous in every nerve, showing no trace whatever of the fact that two hours of broken sleep had been his sole portion for a night, in which he had gone through emotions and sustained a travail of brain either of which would have left a mark on most men.

Then the meeting in the drive! How plainly he saw them both—Raeburn grave and pale, Marcella in her dark serge skirt and cap, with an eye all passion and a cheek white as her hand.

'A tragic splendour enwrapped her!—a fierce heroic air. She was the embodiment of the moment—of the melancholy morning with its rain and leafless woods—of the human anguish throbbing in the little village. And I, who had seen her last in her festal dress, who had held her warm perfumed youth in my arms, who had watched in her white breast the heaving of the heart that I—*I* had troubled!—how did I find it possible to stand and face her? But I did. It rushed through me at once *how* I would make her forgive me—how I would regain possession of her. I had thought the play was closed: it was suddenly plain to me that the second act was but just beginning. She and Raeburn had already come to words—I knew it directly I saw them. This business will divide them more and

more. His *conscience* will come in—and a Raeburn's conscience is the devil!

'By now he hates me; every word I speak to him—still more every word to her—galls him. But he controlled himself when I made him tell me the story—I had no reason to complain—though every now and then I could see him wince under the knowledge I must needs show of the persons and places concerned—a knowledge I could only have got from *her*. And she stood by meanwhile like a statue. Not a word, not a look, so far, though she had been forced to touch my hand. But my instinct saved me. I roused her—I played upon her! I took the line that I was morally certain *she* had been taking in their *tête-à-tête*. Why not a scuffle?—a general scrimmage?—in which it was matter of accident who fell? The man surely was inoffensive and gentle, incapable of deliberate murder. And as to the evidence of hatred, it told both ways. He stiffened and was silent. What a fine brow he has—a look sometimes, when he is moved, of antique power and probity! But she—she trembled—animation came back. She would almost have spoken to me—but I did well not to prolong it—to hurry on.'

Then he took the telegram out of his pocket which had been put into his hands as he reached the hotel, his mouth quivering again with the exultation which he had felt when he had received it. It recalled to his ranging memory all the details of his hurried interview with the little Widrington solicitor, who had already

scented a job in the matter of Hurd's defence. This man—needy, shrewd, and well equipped with local knowledge—had done work for Wharton and the party, and asked nothing better than to stand well with the future member for the division. 'There is a lady,' Wharton had said, 'the daughter of Mr. Boyce of Mellor, who is already very much interested in this fellow and his family. She takes this business greatly to heart. I have seen her this morning, but had no time to discuss the matter with her. She will, I have little doubt, try to help the relations in the arrangements for the defence. Go to her this morning—tell her that the case has my sympathy—that, as she knows, I am a barrister, and, if she wishes it, I will defend Hurd. I shall be hard put to it to get up the case with the election coming on, but I will do it—for the sake of the public interest involved. You understand? Her father is a Tory—and she is just about to marry Mr. Raeburn. Her position, therefore, is difficult. Nevertheless, she will feel strongly—she does feel strongly about this case, and about the whole game system—and I feel moved to support her. She will take her own line, whatever happens. See her—see the wife, too, who is entirely under Miss Boyce's influence—and wire to me at my hotel at Birmingham. If they wish to make other arrangements, well and good. I shall have all the more time to give to the election.'

Leaving this commission behind him, he had started on his journey. At the end of it a tele-

gram had been handed to him on the stairs of his hotel :—

'Have seen the lady, also Mrs. Hurd. You are urgently asked to undertake defence.'

He spread it out before him now, and pondered it. The bit of flimsy paper contained for him the promise of all he most coveted—influence, emotion, excitement. 'She will have returns upon herself,' he thought smiling, 'when I see her again. She will be dignified, resentful; she will suspect everything I say or do—still more, she will suspect herself. No matter! The situation is in my hands. Whether I succeed or fail, she will be forced to work with me, to consult with me—she will owe me gratitude. What made her consent?—she must have felt it in some sort a humiliation. Is it that Raeburn has been driving her to strong measures—that she wants, woman-like, to win, and thought me after all her best chance, and put her pride in her pocket? Or is it?—ah! one should put *that* out of one's head. It's like wine—it unsteadies one. And for a thing like this one must go into training. Shall I write to her—there is just time now, before I start—take the lofty tone, the equal masculine tone, which I have noticed she likes?—ask her pardon for an act of madness—before we go together to the rescue of a life? It might do—it might go down. But no, I think not! Let the situation develop itself. Action and reaction—the unexpected—I commit myself to that. *She*—marry Aldous Raeburn in a month? Well she may

—certainly she may. But there is no need for me, I think, to take it greatly into account. Curious! twenty-four hours ago I thought it all done with—dead and done with. "So like Provvy," as Bentham used to say, when he heard of anything particularly unseemly in the way of natural catastrophe. Now to dine, and be off! How little sleep can I do with in the next fortnight?'

He rang, ordered his cab, and then went to the coffee-room for some hasty food. As he was passing one of the small tables with which the room was filled, a man who was dining there with a friend recognised him and gave him a cold nod. Wharton walked on to the further end of the room, and, while waiting for his meal, buried himself in the local evening paper, which already contained a report of his speech.

'Did you see that man?' asked the stranger of his friend.

'The small young fellow with the curly hair?'

'Small young fellow, indeed! He is the wiriest athlete I know—extraordinary physical strength for his size—and one of the cleverest rascals out as a politician. I am a neighbour of his in the country. His property joins mine. I knew his father—a little, dried-up old chap of the old school—very elegant manners and very obstinate—worried to death by his wife—oh, my goodness! such a woman!'

'What's the name?' said the friend interrupting.

'Wharton—H. S. Wharton. His mother was a

daughter of Lord Westgate, and *her* mother was an actress whom the old lord married in his dotage. Lady Mildred Wharton was like Garrick, only natural when she was acting, which she did on every possible occasion. A preposterous woman! Old Wharton ought to have beaten her for her handwriting, and murdered her for her gowns. Her signature took a sheet of note-paper, and as for her dress I never could get out of her way. Whatever part of the room I happened to be in I always found my feet tangled in her skirts. Somehow, I never could understand how she was able to find so much stuff of one pattern. But it was only to make you notice her, like all the rest. Every bit of her was a pose, and the maternal pose was the worst of all.'

'H. S. Wharton?' said the other. 'Why, that's the man who has been speaking here to-day. I've just been reading the account of it in the *Evening Star*. A big meeting—called by a joint committee of the leading Birmingham trades to consider the Liberal election programme as it affects labour—that's the man—he's been at it hammer and tongs—red-hot—all the usual devices for harrying the employer out of existence, with a few trifles—graduated income-tax and land nationalisation—thrown in. Oh! that's the man, is it?—they say he had a great reception—spoke brilliantly—and is certainly going to get into Parliament next week.'

The speaker, who had the air of a shrewd and prosperous manufacturer, put up his eyeglass to look at this young Robespierre. His *vis-à-vis*—a stout country

gentleman who had been in the army and knocked about the world before coming into his estate—shrugged his shoulders.

'So I hear—he daren't show his nose as a candidate in *our* part of the world, though of course he does us all the harm he can. I remember a good story of his mother—she quarrelled with her husband and all her relations, his and hers, and then she took to speaking in public, accompanied by her dear boy. On one occasion she was speaking at a market town near us, and telling the farmers that as far as she was concerned she would like to see the big properties cut up to-morrow. The sooner her father's and husband's estates were made into small holdings stocked with public capital the better. After it was all over, a friend of mine, who was there, was coming home in a sort of omnibus that ran between the town and a neighbouring village. He found himself between two fat farmers, and this was the conversation — broad Lincolnshire, of course: "Did tha hear Lady Mildred Wharton say them things, Willum?" "Aye, a did." "What did tha think, Willum?" "What did *tha* think, George?" "Wal, *aa* thowt Laady Mildred Wharton wor a graät fule, Willum, if tha asks me." "I'll uphowd tha, George! I'll uphowd tha!" said the other, and then they talked no more for the rest of the journey.'

The friend laughed.

'So it was from the dear mamma that the young man got his opinions?'

'Of course. She dragged him into every absurdity she could from the time he was fifteen. When the husband died she tried to get the servants to come in to meals, but the butler struck. So did Wharton himself, who, for a Socialist, has always showed a very pretty turn for comfort. I am bound to say he was cut up when she died. It was the only time I ever felt like being civil to him—in those months after she departed. I suppose she was devoted to him—which after all is something.'

'Good heavens!' said the other, still lazily turning over the pages of the newspaper as they sat waiting for their second course, 'here is another poaching murder—in Brookshire—the third I have noticed within a month. On Lord Maxwell's property—you know them?'

'I know the old man a little—fine old fellow! They'll make him President of the Council, I suppose. He can't have much work left in him; but it is such a popular, respectable name. Ah! I'm sorry; the sort of thing to distress him terribly.'

'I see the grandson is standing.'

'Oh yes; will get in too. A queer sort of man—great ability and high character. But you can't imagine him getting on in politics, unless it's by sheer weight of wealth and family influence. He'll find a scruple in every bush—never stand the rough work of the House, or get on with the *men*. My goodness! you have to pull with some queer customers nowadays. By the way, I hear he is making an unsatisfactory

marriage—a girl very handsome, but with no manners, and like nobody else—the daughter, too, of an extremely shady father. It's surprising; you'd have thought a man like Aldous Raeburn would have looked for the pick of things.'

'Perhaps it was she looked for the pick of things!' said the other with a blunt laugh. 'Waiter, another bottle of champagne!'

CHAPTER XI

Marcella was lying on the sofa in the Mellor drawing-room. The February evening had just been shut out, but she had told William not to bring the lamps till they were rung for. Even the fire-light seemed more than she could bear. She was utterly exhausted both in body and mind, yet, as she lay there with shut eyes, and hands clasped under her cheek, a start went through her at every sound in the house, which showed that she was not resting, but listening. She had spent the morning in the Hurds' cottage, sitting by Mrs. Hurd and nursing the little boy. Minta Hurd, always delicate and consumptive, was now generally too ill from shock and misery to be anywhere but in her bed, and Willie was growing steadily weaker, though the child's spirit was such that he would insist on dressing on hearing and knowing everything about his father and on moving about the house as usual. Yet every movement of his wasted bones cost him the effort of a hero, and the dumb signs in him of longing for his father increased the general impression as of some patient creature driven by Nature to monstrous and disproportionate extremity.

The plight of this handful of human beings worked in Marcella like some fevering torture. She was wholly out of gear physically and morally. Another practically sleepless night, peopled with images of horror, had decreased her stock of sane self-control, already lessened by long conflict of feeling and the pressure of self-contempt. Now, as she lay listening for Aldous Raeburn's ring and step, she hardly knew whether to be angry with him for coming so late, or miserable that he should come at all. That there was a long score to settle between herself and him she knew well. Shame for an experience which seemed to her maiden sense indelible —both a weakness and a treachery—lay like a dull weight on heart and conscience. But she would not realise it, she would not act upon it. She shook the moral debate from her impatiently. Aldous should have his due all in good time—should have ample opportunity of deciding whether he would, after all, marry such a girl as she. Meanwhile his attitude with regard to the murder exasperated her. Yet, in some strange way it relieved her to be angry and sore with him—to have a grievance she could avow, and on which she made it a merit to dwell. His gentle, yet firm difference of opinion with her on the subject struck her as something new in him. It gave her a kind of fierce pleasure to fight it. He seemed somehow to be providing her with excuses—to be coming down to her level—to be equalling wrong with wrong.

The door handle turned. At last! She sprang up.

But it was only William coming in with the evening post. Mrs. Boyce followed him. She took a quiet look at her daughter, and asked if her headache was better, and then sat down near her to some needlework. During these two days she had been unusually kind to Marcella. She had none of the little feminine arts of consolation. She was incapable of fussing, and she never caressed. But from the moment that Marcella had come home from the village that morning, a pale, hollow-eyed wreck, the mother had asserted her authority. She would not hear of the girl's crossing the threshold again; she had put her on the sofa and dosed her with sal-volatile. And Marcella was too exhausted to rebel. She had only stipulated that a note should be sent to Aldous, asking him to come on to Mellor with the news as soon as the verdict of the coroner's jury should be given. The jury had been sitting all day, and the verdict was expected in the evening.

Marcella turned over her letters till she came to one from a London firm which contained a number of cloth patterns. As she touched it she threw it aside with a sudden gesture of impatience, and sat upright.

'Mamma! I have something to say to you.'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Mamma, the wedding must be put off!—it *must*!—for some weeks. I have been thinking about it while I have been lying here. How *can* I?—you can see for yourself. That miserable woman depends on me

altogether. How can I spend my time on clothing and dressmakers? I feel as if I could think of nothing else —nothing else in the world—but her and her children.' She spoke with difficulty, her voice high and strained. 'The assizes may be held that very week—who knows?—the very day we are married.'

She stopped, looking at her mother almost threateningly. Mrs. Boyce showed no sign of surprise. She put her work down.

'I had imagined you might say something of the kind,' she said after a pause. 'I don't know that, from your point of view, it is unreasonable, But, of course, you must understand that very few people will see it from your point of view. Aldous Raeburn may—you must know best. But his people certainly won't; and your father will think it——'

'Madness,' she was going to say, but with her usual instinct for the moderate fastidious word she corrected it to 'foolish.'

Marcella's tired eyes were all wilfulness and defiance

'I can't help it. I couldn't do it. I will tell Aldous at once. It must be put off for a month. And even that,' she added with a shudder, 'will be bad enough.'

Mrs. Boyce could not help an unperceived shrug of the shoulders, and a movement of pity towards the future husband. Then she said drily,——

'You must always consider whether it is just to Mr.

Raeburn to let a matter of this kind interfere so considerably with his wishes and his plans. He must, I suppose, be in London for Parliament within six weeks.'

Marcella did not answer. She sat with her hands round her knees lost in perplexities. The wedding, as originally fixed, was now three weeks and three days off. After it, she and Aldous were to have spent a short fortnight's honeymoon at a famous house in the north, lent them for the occasion by a Duke who was a cousin of Aldous's on the mother's side, and had more houses than he knew what to do with. Then they were to go immediately up to London for the opening of Parliament. The furnishing of the Mayfair house was being pressed on. In her new-born impatience with such things, Marcella had hardly of late concerned herself with it at all, and Miss Raeburn, scandalised, yet not unwilling, had been doing the whole of it, subject to conscientious worryings of the bride, whenever she could be got hold of, on the subject of papers and curtains.

As they sat silent, the unspoken idea in the mother's mind was—'Eight weeks more will carry us past the execution.' Mrs. Boyce had already possessed herself very clearly of the facts of the case, and it was her perception that Marcella was throwing herself headlong into a hopeless struggle—together with something else—a confession perhaps of a touch of greatness in the girl's temper, passionate and violent as it was, that had led

to this unwonted softness of manner, this absence of sarcasm.

Very much the same thought—only treated as a nameless horror not to be recognised or admitted—was in Marcella's mind also, joined however with another, unsuspected even by Mrs. Boyce's acuteness. 'Very likely—when I tell him—he will not want to marry me at all—and of course I shall tell him.'

But not yet—certainly not yet. She had the instinctive sense that during the next few weeks she should want all her dignity with Aldous, that she could not afford to put herself at a disadvantage with him. To be troubled about her own sins at such a moment would be like the meanness of the lazy and canting Christian, who whines about saving his soul while he ought to be rather occupied with feeding the bodies of his wife and children.

A ring at the front door. Marcella rose, leaning one hand on the end of the sofa—a long slim figure in her black dress—haggard and pathetic.

When Aldous entered, her face was one question. He went up to her and took her hand.

'In the case of Westall the verdict is one of "Wilful Murder" against Hurd. In that of poor Charlie Dynes the court is adjourned. Enough evidence has been taken to justify burial. But there is news to-night that one of the Widrington gang has turned informer, and the police say they will have their hands on them all within the next two or three days.'

Marcella withdrew herself from him and fell back into the corner of the sofa. Shading her eyes with her hand she tried to be very composed and business-like.

'Was Hurd himself examined?'

'Yes, under the new Act. He gave the account which he gave to you and to his wife. But the Court——'

'Did not believe it?'

'No. The evidence of motive was too strong. It was clear from his own account that he was out for poaching purposes, that he was leading the Oxford gang, and that he had a gun while Westall was unarmed. He admitted too that Westall called on him to give up the bag of pheasants he held, and the gun. He refused. Then he says Westall came at him, and he fired. Dick Patton and one or two others gave evidence as to the language he has habitually used about Westall for months past.'

'Cowards—curs!' cried Marcella, clenching both her hands, a kind of sob in her throat.

Aldous, already white and careworn, showed, Mrs. Boyce thought, a ray of indignation for an instant. Then he resumed steadily—

'And Brown, our steward, gave evidence as to his employment since October. The coroner summed up carefully, and I think fairly, and the verdict was given about half-past six.'

'They took him back to prison?'

'Of course. He comes before the magistrates on Thursday.'

'And you will be one!'

The girl's tone was indescribable.

Aldous started. Mrs. Boyce reddened with anger, and checking her instinct to intervene, began to put away her working materials that she might leave them together. While she was still busy Aldous said:—

'You forget; no magistrate ever tries a case in which he is personally concerned. I shall take no part in the trial. My grandfather, of course, must prosecute.'

'But it will be a bench of landlords,' cried Marcella; 'of men with whom a poacher is already condemned.'

'You are unjust to us, I think,' said Aldous slowly, after a pause, during which Mrs. Boyce left the room—'to some of us, at any rate. Besides, as of course you know, the case will be simply sent on for trial at the assizes. By the way'—his tone changed—'I hear to-night that Harry Wharton undertakes the defence.'

'Yes,' said Marcella defiantly. 'Is there anything to say against it? You wouldn't wish Hurd not to be defended, I suppose?'

'Marcella!'

Even her bitter mood was pierced by the tone. She had never wounded him so deeply yet, and for a moment he felt the situation intolerable; the surging grievance and reproach, with which his heart was really full, all but found vent in an outburst which would have wholly swept away his ordinary measure and self-control. But then, as he looked at her, it struck his

lover's sense painfully how pale and miserable she was. He could not scold! But it came home to him strongly that for her own sake and his it would be better there should be explanations. After all things had been going untowardly for many weeks. His nature moved slowly and with much self-doubt, but it was plain to him now that he must make a stand.

After his cry, her first instinct was to apologise. Then the words stuck in her throat. To her, as to him, they seemed to be close on a trial of strength. If she could not influence him in this matter—so obvious, as it seemed to her, and so near to her heart—what was to become of that lead of hers in their married life, on which she had been reckoning from the beginning? All that was worst in her and all that was best rose to the struggle.

But, as he did not speak, she looked up at last.

'I was waiting,' he said in a low voice.

'What for?'

'Waiting till you should tell me you did not mean what you said.'

She saw that he was painfully moved; she also saw that he was introducing something into their relation, an element of proud self-assertion, which she had never felt in it before. Her own vanity instantly rebelled.

'I ought not to have said exactly what I did,' she said, almost stifled by her own excitement, and making great efforts not to play the mere wilful child; 'that I

admit. But it has been clear to me from the beginning that—that'—her words hurried, she took up a book and restlessly lifted it and let it fall—' you have never looked at this thing justly. You have looked at the crime as anyone must who is a landowner; you have never allowed for the provocation; you have not let yourself feel pity——'

He made an exclamation.

'Do you know where I was before I went in to the inquest?'

'No,' she said defiantly, determined not to be impressed, feeling a childish irritation at the interruption.

'I was with Mrs. Westall. Harden and I went in to see her. She is a hard, silent woman. She is clearly not popular in the village, and no one comes in to her. Her'—he hesitated—'her baby is expected before long. She is in such a state of shock and excitement that Clarke thinks it quite possible she may go out of her mind. I saw her sitting by the fire, quite silent, not crying, but with a wild eye that means mischief. We have sent in a nurse to help Mrs. Jellison watch her. She seems to care nothing about her boy. Everything that that woman most desired in life has been struck from her at a blow. Why? That a man who was in no stress of poverty, who had friends and employment, should indulge himself in acts which he knew to be against the law, and had promised you and his wife to forgo, and should at the same time satisfy a wild beast's hatred against the man, who was simply

defending his master's property. Have *you* no pity for Mrs. Westall or her child?'

He spoke as calmly as he could, making his appeal to reason and moral sense; but, in reality, every word was charged with electric feeling.

'I *am* sorry for her!' cried Marcella passionately. 'But, after all, how can one feel for the oppressor, or those connected with him, as one does for the victim?' He shook his head, protesting against the word, but she rushed on. 'You *do* know—for I told you yesterday—how under the shelter of this *hateful* game system Westall made Hurd's life a burden to him when he was a young man—how he had begun to bully him again this past year. We had the same sort of dispute the other day about that murder in Ireland. You were shocked that I would not condemn the Moonlighters who had shot their landlord from behind a hedge, as you did. You said the man had tried to do his duty, and that the murder was brutal and unprovoked. But I thought of the *system*—of the *memories* in the minds of the murderers. There *were* excuses—he suffered for his father—I am not going to judge that as I judge other murders. So, when a Czar of Russia is blown up, do you expect one to think only of his wife and children? No! I will think of the tyranny and the revolt; I will pray, yes, *pray* that I might have courage to do as they did! You may think me wild and mad. I dare say. I am made so. I shall always feel so!'

She flung out her words at him, every limb quivering

under the emotion of them. His cool, penetrating eye, this manner she had never yet known in him, exasperated her.

'Where was the tyranny in this case?' he asked her quietly. 'I agree with you that there are murders and murders. But I thought your point was that here was neither murder nor attack, but only an act of self-defence. That is Hurd's plea.'

She hesitated and stumbled.

'I know,' she said, 'I know. I believe it. But, even if the attack had been on Hurd's part, I should still find excuses, because of the system, and because of Westall's hatefulness.'

He shook his head again.

'Because a man is harsh and masterful, and uses stinging language, is he to be shot down like a dog?'

There was a silence. Marcella was lashing herself up by thoughts of the deformed man in his cell, looking forward after the wretched, unsatisfied life, which was all society had allowed him, to the violent death by which society would get rid of him—of the wife yearning her heart away—of the boy, whom other human beings, under the name of law, were about to separate from his father for ever. At last she broke out thickly and indistinctly:—

'The terrible thing is that I cannot count upon you—that now I cannot make you feel as I do—feel with me. And by-and-by, when I shall want your help

desperately, when your help might be everything—I suppose it will be no good to ask it.'

He started, and bending forward he possessed himself of both her hands—her hot trembling hands—and kissed them with a passionate tenderness.

'What help will you ask of me that I cannot give? That would be hard to bear!'

Still held by him, she answered his question by another:—

'Give me your idea of what will happen. Tell me how you think it will end.'

'I shall only distress you, dear,' he said sadly.

'No; tell me. You think him guilty. You believe he will be convicted.'

'Unless some wholly fresh evidence is forthcoming,' he said reluctantly, 'I can see no other issue.'

'Very well; then he will be sentenced to death. But, after sentence—I know—that man from Widrington, that solicitor told me—if—if strong influence is brought to bear—if anybody whose word counts—if Lord Maxwell and you, were to join the movement to save him—— There is sure to be a movement—the Radicals will take it up. Will you do it—will you promise me now—for my sake?'

He was silent.

She looked at him, all her heart burning in her eyes, conscious of her woman's power too, and pressing it. 'If that man is hanged,' she said pleadingly, 'it will leave a mark on my life nothing will ever smooth out.

I shall feel myself somehow responsible. I shall say to myself, if I had not been thinking about my own selfish affairs — about getting married — about the straw-plaiting—I might have seen what was going on. I might have saved these people, who have been my friends—my *real* friends—from this horror.'

She drew her hands away and fell back on the sofa, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. 'If you had seen her this morning!' she said in a strangled voice. 'She was saying, "Oh, Miss, if they do find him guilty, they can't hang him—not my poor deformed Jim, that never had a chance of being like the others. Oh, we'll beg so hard. I know there's many people will speak for him. He was mad, Miss, when he did it. He'd never been himself, not since last winter, when we all sat and starved, and he was driven out of his senses by thinking of me and the children. You'll get Mr. Raeburn to speak—won't you, Miss?—and Lord Maxwell? It was their game. I know it was their game. But they'll forgive him. They're such great people, and so rich—and we—we've always had such a struggle. Oh, the bad times we've had, and no one know! They'll try and get him off, Miss? Oh, I'll go and *beg* of them."'

She stopped, unable to trust her voice any further. He stooped over her and kissed her brow. There was a certain solemnity in the moment for both of them. The pity of human fate overshadowed them. At last he said firmly, yet with great feeling :—

'I will not prejudge anything, that I promise you. I will keep my mind open to the last. But—I should like to say—it would not be any easier to me to throw myself into an agitation for reprieve because this man was tempted to crime by *my* property—on *my* land. I should think it right to look at it altogether from the public point of view. The satisfaction of my own private compunctions—of my own private feelings—is not what I ought to regard. My own share in the circumstances, in the conditions which made such an act possible does indeed concern me deeply. You cannot imagine but that the moral problem of it has possessed me ever since this dreadful thing happened. It troubled me much before. Now, it has become an oppression—a torture. I have never seen my grandfather so moved, so distressed, in all my remembrance of him. Yet he is a man of the old school, with the old standards. As for me, if ever I come to the estate I will change the whole system; I will run no risks of such human wreck and ruin as this——'

His voice faltered.

'But,' he resumed, speaking steadily again, 'I ought to warn you that such considerations as these will not affect my judgment of this particular case. In the first place, I have no quarrel with capital punishment as such. I do not believe we could rightly give it up. Your attitude properly means that wherever we can legitimately feel pity for a murderer, we should let him escape his penalty. I, on the other hand, believe

that if the murderer saw things as they truly are, he would himself *claim* his own death, as his best chance, his only chance—in this mysterious universe !—of self-recovery. Then it comes to this—was the act murder ? The English law of murder is not perfect, but it appears to me to be substantially just, and guided by it——'

'You talk as if there were no such things as mercy and pity in the world,' she interrupted wildly; 'as if laws were not made and administered by men of just the same stuff and fabric as the lawbreaker ! '

He looked troubled.

'Ah, but *law* is something beyond laws or those who administer them,' he said in a lower tone; 'and the law—the *obligation-sense*—of our own race and time, however imperfect it may be, is sacred, not because it has been imposed upon us from without, but because it has grown up to what it is, out of our own best life—ours, yet not ours—the best proof we have, when we look back at it in the large, when we feel its work in ourselves of some diviner power than our own will—our best clue to what that power may be ! '

He spoke at first, looking away—wrestling out his thought, as it were, by himself—then turning back to her, his eyes emphasised the appeal implied, though not expressed, in what he said—intense appeal to her for sympathy, forbearance, mutual respect, through all acuteness of difference. His look both promised and implored.

He had spoken to her but very rarely or indirectly

as yet of his own religious or philosophical beliefs. She was in a stage when such things interested her but little, and reticence in personal matters was so much the law of his life that even to her expansion was difficult. So that—inevitably—she was arrested, for the moment, as any quick perception must be, by the things that unveil character.

Then an upheaval of indignant feeling swept the impression away. All that he said might be ideally, profoundly true—*but*—the red blood of the common life was lacking in every word of it! He ought to be incapable of saying it *now*. Her passionate question was, how could he *argue*—how could he hold and mark the ethical balance—when a *woman* was suffering, when *children* were to be left fatherless? Besides—the ethical balance itself—does it not alter according to the hands that hold it—poacher or landlord, rich or poor?

But she was too exhausted to carry on the contest in words. Both felt it would have to be renewed. But she said to herself secretly that Mr. Wharton, when he got to work, would alter the whole aspect of affairs. And she knew well that her vantage-ground as towards Aldous was strong.

Then at last he was free to turn his whole attention for a little to her and her physical state, which made him miserable. He had never imagined that anyone, vigorous and healthy as she was, could look so worn out in so short a time. She let him talk to her—lament,

entreat, advise—and at last she took advantage of his anxiety and her admissions to come to the point, to plead that the marriage should be put off.

She used the same arguments that she had done to her mother.

'How can I bear to be thinking of these things?' —she pointed a shaking finger at the dress patterns lying scattered on the table—'with this agony, this death, under my eyes?'

It was a great blow to him, and the practical inconveniences involved were great. But the fibre of him—of which she had just felt the toughness—was delicate and sensitive as her own, and after a very short recoil he met her with great chivalry and sweetness, agreeing that everything should be put off for six weeks, till Easter in fact. She would have been very grateful to him but that something—some secret thought—checked the words she tried to say.

'I must go home then,' he said, rising and trying to smile. 'I shall have to make things straight with Aunt Neta, and set a great many arrangements in train. Now, you will *try* to think of something else? Let me leave you with a book that I can imagine you will read.'

She let herself be tended and thought for. At the last, just as he was going, he said:—

'Have you seen Mr. Wharton at all since this happened?'

His manner was just as usual. She felt that her

eye was guilty, but the darkness of the firelit room shielded her.

'I have not seen him since we met him in the drive. I saw the solicitor who is working up the case for him yesterday. He came over to see Mrs. Hurd and me. I had not thought of asking him, but we agreed that, if he would undertake it, it would be the best chance.'

'It *is* probably the best chance,' said Aldous thoughtfully. 'I believe Wharton has not done much at the Bar since he was called, but that, no doubt, is because he has had so much on his hands in the way of journalism and politics. His ability is enough for anything, and he will throw himself into this. I do not think Hurd could do better.'

She did not answer. She felt that he was magnanimous, but felt it coldly, without emotion.

He came and stooped over her.

'Good-night—good-night—tired child—dear heart! When I saw you in that cottage this morning I thought of the words, "Give, and it shall be given unto you." All that my life can do to pour good measure, pressed down, running over, into yours, I vowed you then!'

When the door closed upon him, Marcella, stretched in the darkness, shed the bitterest tears that had ever yet been hers—tears which transformed her youth—which baptised her, as it were, into the fulness of our tragic life.

She was still weeping when she heard the door softly opened. She sprang up and dried her eyes, but the little figure that glided in was not one to shrink from. Mary Harden came and sat down beside her.

'I knew you would be miserable. Let me come and cry too. I have been my round—have seen them all—and I came to bring you news.'

'How has she taken—the verdict?' asked Marcella, struggling with her sobs, and succeeding at last in composing herself.

'She was prepared for it. Charlie told her when he saw her after you left this afternoon that she must expect it.'

There was a pause.

'I shall soon hear, I suppose,' said Marcella in a hardening voice, her hands round her knees, 'what Mr. Wharton is doing for the defence. He will appear before the magistrates, I suppose.'

'Yes; but Charlie thinks the defence will be mainly reserved. Only a little more than a fortnight to the assizes! The time is so short. But now this man has turned informer, they say the case is quite straightforward. With all the other evidence the police have there will be no difficulty in trying them all. Marcella!'

'Yes.'

Had there been light enough to show it, Mary's face would have revealed her timidity.

'Marcella, Charlie asked me to give you a message. He begs you not to—not to make Mrs. Hurd hope too

much. He himself believes there is no hope, and it is not kind.'

'Are you and he like all the rest,' cried Marcella, her passion breaking out again, 'only eager to have blood for blood?'

Mary waited an instant.

'It has almost broken Charlie's heart,' she said at last; 'but he thinks it was murder, and that Hurd will pay the penalty; nay, more'—she spoke with a kind of religious awe in her gentle voice—'that he ought to be glad to pay it. He believes it to be God's will, and I have heard him say that he would even have executions in public again—under stricter regulations of course—that we may not escape, as we always do if we can—from all sight and thought of God's justice and God's punishments.'

Marcella shuddered and rose. She almost threw Mary's hand away from her.

'Tell your brother from me, Mary,' she said, 'that his God is to *me* just a constable in the service of the English game-laws! If He *is* such a one, I at least will fling my Everlasting No at him while I live.'

And she swept from the room, leaving Mary aghast.

Meanwhile there was consternation and wrath at Maxwell Court, where Aldous, on his return from Mellor, had first of all given his great-aunt the news of the coroner's verdict, and had then gone on to break to

her the putting-off of the marriage. His championship of Marcella in the matter, and his disavowal of all grievance were so quiet and decided, that Miss Raeburn had been only able to allow herself a very modified strain of comment and remonstrance, so long as he was still there to listen. But she was all the more outspoken when he was gone, and Lady Winterbourne was sitting with her. Lady Winterbourne, who was at home alone, while her husband was with a married daughter on the Riviera, had come over to dine *tête-à-tête* with her friend, finding it impossible to remain solitary while so much was happening.

'Well, my dear,' said Miss Raeburn shortly, as her guest entered the room, 'I may as well tell you at once that Aldous' marriage is put off.'

'Put off!' exclaimed Lady Winterbourne bewildered. 'Why it was only Thursday that I was discussing it all with Marcella, and she told me everything was settled.'

'Thursday!—I dare say!' said Miss Raeburn, stitching away with fiery energy; 'but since then a poacher has murdered one of our gamekeepers, which makes all the difference.'

'What *do* you mean, Agneta?'

'What I say, my dear. The poacher was Marcella's friend, and she cannot now distract her mind from him sufficiently to marry Aldous, though every plan he has in the world will be upset by her proceedings. And as for his election, you may depend upon it she will never

ask or know whether he gets in next Monday or no. That goes without saying. She is meanwhile absorbed with the poacher's defence—*Mr. Wharton*, of course, conducting it. This is your modern young woman, my dear—typical, I should think.'

Miss Raeburn turned her buttonhole in fine style, and at lightning speed, to show the coolness of her mind, then, with a rattling of all her lockets, looked up and waited for Lady Winterbourne's reflections.

'She has often talked to me of these people—the Hurds,' said Lady Winterbourne slowly. 'She has always made special friends with them. Don't you remember she told us about them that day she first came back to lunch?'

'Of course I remember! That day she lectured Maxwell, at first sight, on his duties. She began well. As for these people,' said Miss Raeburn more slowly, 'one is, of course, sorry for the wife and children, though I am a good deal sorrier for Mrs. Westall, and poor, poor Mrs. Dynes. The whole affair has so upset Maxwell and me, we have hardly been able to eat or sleep since. I thought it made Maxwell look dreadfully old this morning, and with all that he has got before him too! I shall insist on sending for Clarke to-morrow morning if he does not have a better night. And now this postponement will be one more trouble—all the engagements to alter, and the invitations. *Really*! that girl.'

And Miss Raeburn broke off short, feeling simply

that the words which were allowed to a well-bred person were wholly inadequate to her state of mind.

'But if she feels it—as you or I might feel such a thing about someone we knew or cared for, Agneta?'

'How can she feel it like that?' cried Miss Raeburn, exasperated. 'How can she know anyone of—of that class well enough? It is not seemly, I tell you, Adelaide, and I don't believe it is sincere. It's just done to make herself conspicuous, and show her power over Aldous. For other reasons too, if the truth were known!'

Miss Raeburn turned over the shirt she was making for some charitable society and drew out some tacking threads with a loud noise which relieved her. Lady Winterbourne's old and delicate cheek had flushed.

'I'm sure it's sincere,' she said with emphasis. 'Do you mean to say, Agneta, that one can't sympathise, in such an awful thing, with people of another class, as one would with one's own flesh and blood?'

Miss Raeburn winced. She felt for a moment the pressure of a democratic world—a hated formidable world—through her friend's question. Then she stood to her guns.

'I dare say you'll think it sounds bad,' she said stoutly; 'but in my young days it would have been thought a piece of posing—of sentimentalism—something indecorous and unfitting—if a girl had put herself in such a position. Marcella *ought* to be absorbed in

her marriage; that is the natural thing. How Mrs. Boyce can allow her to mix herself with such things as this murder—to *live* in that cottage, as I hear she has been doing, passes my comprehension.'

'You mean,' said Lady Winterbourne dreamily, 'that if one had been very fond of one's maid, and she died, one wouldn't put on mourning for her. Marcella would.'

'I dare say,' said Miss Raeburn snappishly. 'She is capable of anything far-fetched and theatrical.'

The door opened and Hallin came in. He had been suffering of late, and much confined to the house. But the news of the murder had made a deep and painful impression upon him, and he had been eagerly acquainting himself with the facts. Miss Raeburn, whose kindness ran with unceasing flow along the channels she allowed it, was greatly attached to him in spite of his views, and she now threw herself upon him for sympathy in the matter of the wedding. In any grievance that concerned Aldous she counted upon him, and her shrewd eyes had plainly perceived that he had made no great friendship with Marcella.

'I am very sorry for Aldous,' he said at once; 'but I understand *her* perfectly. So does Aldous.'

Miss Raeburn was angrily silent. But when Lord Maxwell, who had been talking with Aldous, came in, he proved, to her final discomfiture, to be very much of the same opinion.

'My dear,' he said wearily as he dropped into his

chair, his old face grey and pinched, 'this thing is too terrible—the number of widows and orphans that night's work will make before the end breaks my heart to think of. It will be a relief not to have to consider festivities while these men are actually before the courts. What I am anxious about is that Marcella should not make herself ill with excitement. The man she is interested in will be hanged, must be hanged; and with her somewhat volatile, impulsive nature——'

He spoke with old-fashioned discretion and measure. Then quickly he pulled himself up, and, with some trivial question or other, offered his arm to Lady Winterbourne, for Aldous had just come in, and dinner was ready.

CHAPTER XII

NEARLY three weeks passed—short flashing weeks, crowded with agitations, inward or outward, for all the persons of this story.

After the inquiry before the magistrates—conducted, as she passionately thought, with the most marked animus on the part of the bench and police towards the prisoners—had resulted in the committal for trial of Hurd and his five companions, Marcella wrote Aldous Raeburn a letter which hurt him sorely.

'Don't come over to see me for a little while,' it ran. 'My mind is all given over to feelings which must seem to you—which, I know, do seem to you—unreasonable and unjust. But they are my life, and when they are criticised, or even treated coldly, I cannot bear it. When you are not there to argue with, I can believe, most sincerely, that you have a right to see this matter as you do, and that it is monstrous of me to expect you to yield to me entirely in a thing that concerns your sense of public duty. But don't come now—not before the trial. I will appeal to you if I think you can help me. I *know* you will if you can. Mr. Wharton keeps me informed of everything. I enclose his last two

letters, which will show you the line he means to take up with regard to some of the evidence.'

Aldous's reply cost him a prodigal amount of pain and difficulty.

'I will do anything in the world to make these days less of a burden to you. You can hardly imagine that it is not grievous to me to think of any trouble of yours as being made worse by my being with you. But still I understand. One thing only I ask—that you should not imagine the difference between us greater than it is. The two letters you enclose have given me much to ponder. If only the course of the trial enables me with an honest heart to throw myself into your crusade of mercy, with what joy shall I come and ask you to lead me, and to forgive my own slower sense and pity!

'I should like you to know that Hallin is very much inclined to agree with you, to think that the whole affair was a "scrimmage," and that Hurd at least ought to be reprieved. He would have come to talk it over with you himself, but that Clarke forbids him anything that interests or excites him for the present. He has been very ill and suffering for the last fortnight, and, as you know, when these attacks come on we try to keep everything from him that could pain or agitate him. But I see that this whole affair is very much on his mind, in spite of my efforts.

'. . . Oh, my darling! I am writing late at night, with your letter open before me and your picture close to my hand. So many things rise in my mind to say

to you. There will come a time—there *must*!—when I may pour them all out. Meanwhile, amid all jars and frets, remember this, that I have loved you better each day since first we met.

'I will not come to Mellor then for a little while. My election, little heart as I have for it, will fill up the week. The nomination-day is fixed for Thursday, and the polling for Monday.'

Marcella read the letter with a confusion of feeling so great as to be in itself monstrous and demoralising. Was she never to be simple, to see her way clearly again?

As for him, as he rode about the lanes and beech-woods in the days that followed, alone often with that nature for which all such temperaments as Aldous Raeburn's have so secret and so observant an affection, he was perpetually occupied with this difficulty which had arisen between Marcella and himself, turning it over and over in the quiet of the morning, before the turmoil of the day began.

He had followed the whole case before the magistrates with the most scrupulous care. And since then, he had twice run across the Widdrington solicitor for the defence, who was now instructing Wharton. This man, although a strong Radical, and employed generally by his own side, saw no objection at all to letting Lord Maxwell's heir and representative understand how in his opinion the case was going. Aldous Raeburn was a person whom everybody respected; confidences were

safe with him ; and he was himself deeply interested in the affair. The Raeburns being the Raeburns, with all that that implied for smaller people in Brookshire, little Mr. Burridge was aware of no reason whatever why Westall's employers should not know that, although Mr. Wharton was working up the defence with an energy and ability which set Burridge marvelling, it was still his, Burridge's, opinion, that everything that could be advanced would be wholly unavailing with the jury ; that the evidence, as it came into final shape, looked worse for Hurd rather than better ; and that the only hope for the man lay in the after-movement for reprieve which can always be got up in a game-preserving case.

'And is as a rule political and anti-landlord,' thought Aldous, on one of these mornings, as he rode along the edge of the down. He foresaw exactly what would happen. As he envisaged the immediate future, he saw one figure as the centre of it—not Marcella, but Wharton ! Wharton was defending, Wharton would organise the petition, Wharton would apply for his own support and his grandfather's, through Marcella. To Wharton would belong not only the popular *kudos* of the matter, but much more, and above all, Marcella's gratitude.

Aldous pulled up his horse an instant, recognising that spot in the road, that downward stretching glade among the beeches, where he had asked Marcella to be his wife. The pale February sunlight was spreading

from his left hand through the bare grey trunks, and over the distant shoulders of the woods, far into the white and purple of the chalk plain. Sounds of labour came from the distant fields; sounds of winter birds from the branches round him. The place, the time, raised in him all the intensest powers of consciousness. He saw himself as the man *standing midway* in everything—speculation, politics, sympathies—as the perennially ineffective and, as it seemed to his morbid mood, the perennially defeated type, beside the Whartons of this world. Wharton! He knew him—had read him long ago—read him afresh of late. Raeburn's lip showed the contempt, the bitterness which the philosopher could not repress, showed also the humiliation of the lover. Here was he, banished from Marcella; here was Wharton, in possession of her mind and sympathies, busily forging a link—

'It shall be *broken*!' said Raeburn to himself with a sudden fierce concentration of will. 'So much I will claim—and enforce.'

But not now, nothing now, but patience, delicacy, prudence. He gathered himself together with a long breath, and went his way.

For the rest, the clash of motives and affections he felt and foresaw in this matter of the Disley murders became day by day more harassing. The moral debate was strenuous enough. The murders had roused all the humane and ethical instincts, which were in fact

the man, to such a point that they pursued him constantly, in the pauses of his crowded days, like avenging Erinnyes. Hallin's remark that 'game-preserving creates crime' left him no peace. Intellectually he argued it, and on the whole rejected it; morally, and in feeling, it scourged him. He had suffered all his mature life under a too painful and scrupulous sense that he, more than other men, was called to be his brother's keeper. It was natural that, during these exhausting days, the fierce death on Westall's rugged face, the piteous agony in Dynes's young eyes and limbs, should haunt him, should make his landlord's place and responsibility often mere ashes and bitterness.

But, as Marcella had been obliged to perceive, he drew the sharpest line between the bearings of this ghastly business on his own private life and action, and its relation to public order. That the gamekeepers destroyed were his servants, or practically his servants, made no difference to him whatever in his estimate of the crime itself. If the circumstances had been such that he could honestly have held Hurd not to be a murderer, no employer's interest, no landlord's desire for vengeance, would have stood in his way. On the other hand, believing, as he emphatically did, that Hurd's slaying of Westall had been of a kind more deliberate and less capable of excuse than most murders, he would have held it a piece of moral cowardice to allow his own qualms and compunctions as to the rights

and wrongs of game-preserving to interfere with a duty to justice and society.

Ay! and something infinitely dearer to him than his own qualms and compunctions.

Hallin, who watched the whole debate in his friend day by day, was conscious that he had never seen Aldous more himself, in spite of trouble of mind; more 'in character,' so to speak, than at this moment. Spiritual dignity of mind and temper, blended with a painful personal humility, and interfused with all—determining all—elements of judgment, subtleties, prejudices, modes of looking at things, for which he was hardly responsible, so deeply ingrained were they by inheritance and custom. More than this: did not the ultimate explanation of the whole attitude of the man lie in the slow but irresistible revolt of a strong individuality against the passion which had for a time suppressed it? The truth of certain moral relations may be for a time obscured and distorted; none the less, *reality* wins the day. So Hallin read it.

Meanwhile, during days when both for Aldous and Wharton the claims of a bustling, shouting public, which must be canvassed, shaken hands with, and spoken to, and the constant alternations of business meetings, committee-rooms and the rest, made it impossible, after all, for either man to spend more than the odds and ends of thought upon anything outside the clatter of politics, Marcella had been living a life of intense

and monotonous feeling, shut up almost within the walls of a tiny cottage, hanging over sick-beds, and thrilling to each pulse of anguish as it beat in the miserable beings she tended.

The marriage of the season, with all its accompanying festivities and jubilations, had not been put off for seven weeks—till after Easter—without arousing a storm of critical astonishment both in village and county. And when the reason was known—that it was because Miss Boyce had taken the Disley murder so desperately to heart, that until the whole affair was over, and the men either executed or reprieved, she could spare no thought to wedding clothes or cates — there was curiously little sympathy with Marcella. Most of her own class thought it a piece of posing, if they did not say so as frankly as Miss Raeburn—something done for self-advertisement and to advance anti-social opinions; while the Mellor cottagers, with the instinctive English recoil from any touch of sentiment not, so to speak, in the bargain, gossipped and joked about it freely.

'She can't be very fond o' 'im, not of Muster Raeburn, she can't,' said old Patton, delivering himself as he sat leaning on his stick at his open door, while his wife and another woman or two chattered inside. 'Not what I'd call lover-y. She don't want to run in harness, she don't, no sooner than she need. She's a peert filly is Miss Boyce.'

'I've been a-waitin, an' a-waitin,' said his wife

with her gentle sigh, 'to hear summat o' that new straw-plaitin she talk about. But nary a word. They do say as it's give up althegither.'

'No, she's took up wi' nursin Minta Hurd—wonderful took up,' said another woman. 'They do say as Ann Mullins can't abear her. When she's there nobody can open their mouth. When that kind o' thing happens in the fambly it's bad enoof without havin a lady trailin about you all day long, so that you have to be mindin yersel, an thinkin about givin her a cheer, an' the like.'

One day in the dusk, more than a fortnight after the inquest, Marcella, coming from the Hurds' cottage, overtook Mrs. Jellison, who was going home after spending the afternoon with her daughter.

Hitherto Marcella had held aloof from Isabella Westall and her relations, mainly, to do her justice, from fear lest she might somehow hurt or offend them. She had been to see Charlie Dynes's mother, but she had only brought herself to send a message of sympathy through Mary Harden to the keeper's widow.

Mrs. Jellison looked at her askance with her old wild eyes as Marcella came up with her.

'Oh, she's *puddlin* along,' she said in answer to Marcella's inquiry, using a word very familiar in the village. 'She'll not do herself a mischief while there's Nurse Ellen an' me to watch her like a pair o' cats. She's dreadful upset, is Isabella—shouldn't ha thought it of her. That fust day'—a cloud darkened the

curious, dreamy face — 'no, I'm not a-goin to think about that fust day, I'm not, tain't a ha'porth o' good,' she added resolutely; 'but she was all right when they'd let her get 'im 'ome, and wash an settle 'im, an put 'im comfortable like in his coffin. He wor a big man, miss, when he wor laid out! Searle, as made the coffin, told her as ee 'adn't made one such an extry size since old Harry Flood, the blacksmith, fifteen year ago. Ee'd soon a done for Jim Hurd if it 'ad been fists o' both sides. But guns is things as yer can't reckon on.'

'Why didn't he let Hurd alone,' said Marcella sadly, 'and prosecute him next day? It's attacking men when their blood is up that brings these awful things about.'

'Wal, I don't see that,' said Mrs. Jellison pugnaciously; 'he wor paid to do't—an' he had the law on his side. 'Ow's she?' she said, lowering her voice and jerking her thumb in the direction of the Hurds' cottage.

'She's very ill,' replied Marcella with a contraction of the brow. 'Dr. Clarke says she ought to stay in bed, but of course she won't.'

'They're a-goin to try 'im Thursday?' said Mrs. Jellison inquiringly.

'Yes.'

'An' Muster Wharton be a-goin to defend 'im. Muster Wharton may be cliver, ee may—they do say as ee can see the grass growin, ee's that knowin—but ee'll not get Jim Hurd off; there's nobody in the village as

b'lieves for a moment as 'ow he will. They'll best 'im. Lor bless yer, they'll best 'im. I was a-sayin it to Isabella this afternoon—ee'll not save 'is neck, don't you be afeard.'

Marcella drew herself up with a shiver of repulsion.

'Will it mend your daughter's grief to see another woman's heart broken? Don't you suppose it might bring her some comfort, Mrs. Jellison, if she were to try and forgive that poor wretch? She might remember that her husband gave him provocation, and that anyway, if his life is spared, his punishment and their misery will be heavy enough!'

'Oh, lor no!' said Mrs. Jellison composedly. 'She don't want to be forgivin of 'im. Mr. Harden ee come talkin to 'er, but she isn't one o' that sort, isn't Isabella. I'm sartin sure she'll be better in 'erself when they've put 'im out o' the way. It makes her all ov a fever to think of Muster Wharton gettin 'im off. *I* don't bear Jim Hurd no pertickler malice. Isabella may talk herself black i' the face, but she an' Johnnie 'll have to come 'ome and live along o' me, whatever she may say. She can't stay in that cottage, cos they'll be wantin it for another keeper. Lord Maxwell ee's givin her a fine pension, my word ee is! an' says ee'll look after Johnnie. And what with my bit airnins—we'll do, yer know, miss—we'll do!'

The old woman looked up with a nod, her green eyes sparkling with the queer inhuman light that belonged to them.

Marcella could not bring herself to say good-night to her, and was hurrying on without a word, when Mrs. Jellison stopped her.

'An 'ow about that straw-plaitin, miss?' she said slyly.

'I have had to put it on one side for a bit,' said Marcella coldly, hating the woman's society. 'I have had my hands full and Lady Winterbourne has been away; but we shall, of course, take it up again later.'

She walked away quickly, and Mrs. Jellison, hobbled after her, grinning to herself every now and then as she caught the straight tall figure against the red evening sky.

'I'll go in ter town termorrer,' she thought, 'an' have a crack wi' Jimmy Gedge; *ee* needn't be afeard for 'is livin. An' them great fules as ha' bin runnin in a string arter 'er, an' cacklin about their eighteenpence a score, as I've told 'em times, I'll eat my apron the fust week as iver they get it. I don't hold wi' ladies—no, nor passons neither—not when it comes to meddlin wi' your wittles, an' dictatin to yer about forgivin them as ha' got the better ov yer. That young lady there, what do she matter? That sort's allus gaddin about? What'll she keer about us when she's got 'er fine husband? Here o' Saturday, gone o' Monday—that's what she is. Now Jimmy Gedge, yer kin allus count on *'im*. Thirty-six year ee ha' set there in that 'ere shop, an' I guess ee'll set there till they call 'im ter kingdom come. Ee's

a cheatin, sweatin, greedy old skinflint is Jimmy Gedge ; but when yer wants 'im yer *kin* find 'im.'

Marcella hurried home, she was expecting a letter from Wharton, the third within a week. She had not set eyes on him since they had met that first morning in the drive, and it was plain to her that he was as unwilling as she was that there should be any meeting between them. Since the moment of his taking up the case, in spite of the pressure of innumerable engagements, he had found time to send her, almost daily, sheets covered with his small even writing, in which every detail and prospect of the legal situation, so far as it concerned James Hurd, were noted and criticised with a shrewdness and fulness which never wavered, and never lost for a moment the professional note.

'Dear Miss Boyce'—the letters began—leading up to a 'Yours faithfully,' which Marcella read as carefully as the rest. Often, as she turned them over, she asked herself whether that scene in the library had not been a mere delusion of the brain, whether the man whose wild words and act had burnt themselves into her life could possibly be writing her these letters, in this key, without a reference, without an allusion. Every day, as she opened them, she looked them through quietly with a shaking pulse ; every day she found herself proudly able to hand them on to her mother, with the satisfaction of one who has nothing to conceal, whatever the rest of the world may suspect. He was certainly doing

his best to replace their friendship on that level of high comradeship in ideas and causes which, as she told herself, it had once occupied. His own wanton aggression and her weakness had toppled it down thence, and brought it to ruin. She could never speak to him, never know him again till it was re-established. Still his letters galled her. He assumed, she supposed, that such a thing could happen, and nothing more be said about it? How little he knew her, or what she had in her mind!

Now, as she walked along, wrapped in her plaid cape, her thought was one long tumultuous succession of painful or passionate images, interrupted none the less at times by those curious self-observing pauses of which she had always been capable. She had been sitting for hours beside Mrs. Hurd, with little Willie upon her knees. The mother, always anæmic and consumptive, was by now prostrate, the prey of a long-drawn agony, peopled by visions of Jim alone and in prison—Jim on the scaffold with the white cap over his eyes—Jim in the prison coffin—which would rouse her shrieking from dreams which were the rending asunder of soul and body. Minta Hurd's love for the unhappy being who had brought her to this pass had been infinitely maternal. There had been a boundless pity in it, and the secret pride of a soul, which, humble and modest towards all the rest of the world, yet knew itself to be the breath and sustenance, the indispensable aid of one other soul in the universe, and gloried accordingly.

To be cut off now from all ministration, all comforting—to have to lie there like a log, imagining the moment when the neighbours should come in and say, 'It is all over—they have broken his neck—and buried him'—it was a doom beyond all even that her timid pessimist heart had ever dreamed. She had already seen him twice in prison, and she knew that she would see him again. She was to go on Monday, Miss Boyce said, before the trial began, and after—if they brought him in guilty—they would let her say good-bye. She was always thirsting to see him. But when she went, the prison surroundings paralysed her. Both she and Hurd felt themselves caught in the wheels of a great relentless machine, of which the workings filled them with a voiceless terror. He talked to her spasmodically of the most incongruous things—breaking out sometimes with a glittering eye into a string of instances bearing on Westall's bullying and tyrannous ways. He told her to return the books Miss Boyce had lent him, but when asked if he would like to see Marcella he shrank and said no. Mr. Wharton was 'doin capital' for him; but she wasn't to count on his getting off. And he didn't know that he wanted to, neither. Once she took Willie to see him; the child nearly died of the journey; and the father, 'though anyone can see, Miss, he's just sick for 'im,' would not hear of his coming again. Sometimes he would hardly kiss her at parting; he sat on his chair, with his great head drooped forward over his red hands, lost in a kind of animal lethargy. Westall's name

always roused him. Hate still survived. But it made *her* life faint within her to talk of the murdered man—wherein she showed her lack of the usual peasant's realism and curiosity in the presence of facts of blood and violence. When she was told it was time for her to go, and the heavy door was locked behind her, the poor creature, terrified at the warder and the bare prison silences, would hurry away as though the heavy hand of this awful Justice were laid upon her too, torn by the thought of him she left behind, and by the remembrance that he had only kissed her once, and yet impelled by mere physical instinct towards the relief of Ann Mullins's rough face waiting for her—of the outer air and the free heaven.

As for Willie, he was fast dwindling. Another week or two—the doctor said—no more. He lay on Marcella's knee on a pillow, wasted to an infant's weight, panting and staring with those strange blue eyes, but always patient, always struggling to say his painful 'thank you' when she fed him with some of the fruit constantly sent her from Maxwell Court. Everything that was said about his father he took in and understood, but he did not seem to fret. His mother was almost divided from him by this passivity of the dying; nor could she give him or his state much attention. Her gentle, sensitive, but not profound nature was strained already beyond bearing by more gnawing griefs.

After her long sit in Mrs. Hurd's kitchen Marcella found the air of the February evening tonic and de-

lightful. Unconsciously impressions stole upon her—the lengthening day, the celandines in the hedges, the swelling lilac buds in the cottage gardens. They spoke to her youth, and out of mere physical congruity it could not but respond. Still, her face kept the angered look with which she had parted from Mrs. Jellison. More than that—the last few weeks had visibly changed it, had graved upon it the signs of 'living.' It was more beautiful than ever in its significant black and white, but it was older—a *woman* spoke from it. Marcella had gone down into reality, and had found there the rebellion and the storm for which such souls as hers are made. Rebellion most of all. She had been living with the poor, in their stifling rooms, amid their perpetual struggle for a little food and clothes and bodily ease; she had seen this struggle, so hard in itself, combined with agonies of soul and spirit, which made the physical destitution seem to the spectator something brutally gratuitous, a piece of careless and tyrannous cruelty on the part of Nature—or God? She would hardly let herself think of Aldous—though she *must* think of him by and by! He and his fared sumptuously every hour! As for her, it was as though in her woman's arms, on her woman's breast, she carried Lazarus all day, stooping to him with a hungering pity. And Aldous stood aloof. Aldous would not help her—or not with any help worth having—in consoling this misery—binding up these sores. Her heart cried shame on him. She had a crime against him to confess—but

she felt herself his superior none the less. If he cast her off—why then surely they would be quits, quits for good and all.

As she reached the front door of Mellor, she saw a little two-wheeled cart standing outside it, and William holding the pony.

Visitors were nowadays more common at Mellor than they had been, and her instinct was to escape. But as she was turning to a side door William touched his cap to her.

'Mr. Wharton's waiting to see you, Miss.'

She stopped sharply.

'Where is Mrs. Boyce, William?'

'In the drawing-room, Miss.'

She walked in calmly. Wharton was standing on the rug, talking; Mrs. Boyce was listening to what he had to say with the light repellent air Marcella knew so well.

When she came in Wharton stepped forward ceremoniously to shake hands, then began to speak at once, with the manner of one who is on a business errand and has no time to waste.

'I thought it best, Miss Boyce, as I had unexpectedly a couple of spare hours this evening, to come and let you know how things were going. You understand that the case comes on at the assizes next Thursday?'

Marcella assented. She had seated herself on the old sofa beside the fire, her ungloved hands on her knee.

Something in her aspect made Wharton's eyes waver an instant as he looked down upon her—but it was the only sign.

'I should like to warn you,' he said gravely, 'that I entertain no hope whatever of getting James Hurd off. I shall do my best, but the verdict will certainly be murder; and the judge, I think, is sure to take a severe view. We may get a recommendation to mercy, though I believe it to be extremely unlikely. But if so, the influence of the judge, according to what I hear, will probably be against us. The prosecution have got together extremely strong evidence—as to Hurd's long connection with the gang, in spite of the Raeburns' kindness—as to his repeated threats that he would "do for" Westall if he and his friends were interrupted—and so on. His own story is wholly uncorroborated; and Dynes's deposition, so far as it goes, is all against it.'

He went on to elaborate these points with great clearness of exposition and at some length; then he paused.

'This being so,' he resumed, 'the question is, what can be done? There must be a petition. Amongst my own party I shall be, of course, able to do something, but we must have men of all sides. Without some at least of the leading Conservatives, we shall fare badly. In one word—do you imagine that you can induce Mr. Raeburn and Lord Maxwell to sign?'

Mrs. Boyce watched him keenly. Marcella sat in frozen paleness.

'I will try,' she said at last, with deliberation.

'Then'—he took up his gloves—'there may be a chance for us. If you cannot succeed, no one else can. But if Lord Maxwell and Mr. Raeburn can be secured, others will easily follow. Their names — especially under all the circumstances—will carry a peculiar weight. I may say everything, in the first instance—the weight, the first effect of the petition—depends on them. Well, then, I leave it in your hands. No time should be lost after the sentence. As to the grounds of our plea, I shall, of course, lay them down in court to the best of my ability.'

'I shall be there,' she interrupted.

He started. So did Mrs. Boyce, but characteristically she made no comment.

'Well, then,' he resumed after a pause, 'I need say no more for the present. How is the wife?'

She replied, and a few other formal sentences of inquiry or comment passed between them.

'And your election?' said Mrs. Boyce, still studying him with hostile eyes, as he got up to take leave.

'To-morrow!' He threw up his hands with a little gesture of impatience. 'That at least will be one thread spun off and out of the way, whatever happens. I must get back to Widrington as fast as my pony can carry me. Good-bye, Miss Boyce.'

Marcella went slowly upstairs. The scene which had just passed was unreal, impossible; yet every limb was quivering. Then the sound of the front door shut-

ting sent a shock through her whole nature. The first sensation was one of horrible emptiness, forlornness. The next—her mind threw itself with fresh vehemence upon the question, 'Can I, by any means, get my way with Aldous?'

CHAPTER XIII

'And may the Lord have mercy on your soul!'

The deep-pitched words fell slowly on Marcella's ears, as she sat leaning forward in the gallery of the Widrington Assize Court. Women were sobbing beside and behind her. Minta Hurd, to her left, lay in a half-swoon against her sister-in-law, her face buried in Ann's black shawl. For an instant after Hurd's death sentence had been spoken Marcella's nerves ceased to throb—the long exhaustion of feeling stopped. The harsh light and shade of the ill-lit room; the gas-lamps in front of the judge, blanching the ranged faces of the jury; the long table of reporters below, some writing, but most looking intently towards the dock; the figure of Wharton opposite, in his barrister's gown and wig—that face of his, so small, nervous, delicate—the frowning eyebrows a dark bar under the white of the wig—his look, alert and hostile, fixed upon the judge; the heads and attitudes of the condemned men, especially the form of a fair-haired youth, the principal murderer of Charlie Dynes, who stood a little in front of the line, next to Hurd, and overshadowing his dwarf's stature—these things Marcella saw indeed; for years

after she could have described them point by point; but for some seconds or minutes her eyes stared at them without conscious reaction of the mind on the immediate spectacle.

In place of it, the whole day, all these hours that she had been sitting there, rushed before her in a synthesis of thought, replacing the stream of impressions and images. The crushing accumulation of hostile evidence—witness after witness coming forward to add to the damning weight of it; the awful weakness of the defence—Wharton's irritation under it—the sharpness, the useless, acrid ability of his cross-examinations; yet, contrasting with the legal failure, the personal success, the mixture of grace with energy, the technical accomplishment of the manner, as one wrestling before his equals—nothing left here of the garrulous vigour and brutality of the labourers' meeting!—the masterly use of all that could avail, the few quiet words addressed at the end to the pity of the jury, and by implication to the larger ethical sense of the community,—all this she thought of with great intellectual clearness while the judge's sonorous voice rolled along, sentencing each prisoner in turn. Horror and pity were alike weary; the brain asserted itself.

The court was packed. Aldous Raeburn sat on Marcella's right hand; and during the day the attention of everybody in the dingy building had been largely divided between the scene below, and that strange group in the gallery where the man who had just been

elected Conservative member for East Brookshire, who was Lord Maxwell's heir, and Westall's employer, sat beside his betrothed, in charge of a party which comprised not only Marcella Boyce, but the wife, sister, and little girl of Westall's murderer.

On one occasion some blunt answer of a witness had provoked a laugh coming no one knew whence. The judge turned to the gallery and looked up sternly—'I cannot conceive why men and women—women especially—should come crowding in to hear such a case as this; but if I hear another laugh I shall clear the court.' Marcella, whose whole conscious nature was by now one network of sensitive nerve, saw Aldous flush and shrink as the words were spoken. Then, looking across the court, she caught the eye of an old friend of the Raeburns, a county magistrate. At the judge's remark he had turned involuntarily to where she and Aldous sat; then, as he met Miss Boyce's face, instantly looked away again. She perfectly—passionately—understood that Brookshire was very sorry for Aldous Raeburn that day.

The death sentences—three in number—were over. The judge was a very ordinary man; but, even for the ordinary man, such an act carries with it a great tradition of what is befitting, which imposes itself on voice and gesture. When he ceased, the deep breath of natural emotion could be felt and heard throughout the crowded court; loud wails of sobbing women broke from the gallery.

'Silence!' cried an official voice, and the judge resumed, amid stifled sounds that stabbed Marcella's sense, once more nakedly alive to everything around it.

The sentences to penal servitude came to an end also. Then a ghastly pause. The line of prisoners directed by the warders turned right about face towards a door in the back wall of the court. As the men filed out, the tall, fair youth, one of those condemned to death, stopped an instant and waved his hand to his sobbing sweetheart in the gallery. Hurd also turned irresolutely.

'Look!' exclaimed Ann Mullins, propping up the fainting woman beside her, 'he's goin.'

Marcella bent forward. She, rather than the wife, caught the last look on his large dwarf's face, so white and dazed, the eyes blinking under the gas.

Aldous touched her softly on the arm.

'Yes,' she said quickly, 'yes, we must get her out. Ann, can you lift her?'

Aldous went to one side of the helpless woman; Ann Mullins held her on the other. Marcella followed, pressing the little girl close against her long black cloak. The gallery made way for them; everyone looked and whispered till they had passed. Below, at the foot of the stairs, they found themselves in a passage crowded with people—lawyers, witnesses, officials, mixed with the populace. Again a road was opened for Aldous and his charges.

'This way, Mr. Raeburn,' said a policeman with alacrity. 'Stand back, please! Is your carriage there, sir?'

'Let Ann Mullins take her—put them into the cab—I want to speak to Mr. Wharton,' said Marcella in Aldous's ear.

'Get me a cab at once,' he said to the policeman, 'and tell my carriage to wait.'

'Miss Boyce!'

Marcella turned hastily and saw Wharton beside her. Aldous also saw him, and the two men interchanged a few words.

'There is a private room close by,' said Wharton. 'I am to take you there, and Mr. Raeburn will join us at once.'

He led her along a corridor, and opened a door to the left. They entered a small dingy room, looking through a begrimed window on a courtyard. The gas was lit, and the table was strewn with papers.

'Never, never more beautiful!' flashed through Wharton's mind, 'with that knit, strenuous brow—that tragic scorn for a base world—that royal gait——'

Aloud he said:—

'I have done my best privately among the people I can get at, and I thought, before I go up to town to-night—you know Parliament meets on Monday?—I would show you what I had been able to do, and ask you to take charge of a copy of the petition.' He pointed to a long envelope lying on the table. 'I have drafted

it myself—I think it puts all the points we can possibly urge—but as to the names——'

He took out a folded sheet of paper from his breast pocket.

'It won't do,' he said, looking down at it, and shaking his head. 'As I said to you, it is so far political merely. There is a very strong Liberal and Radical feeling getting up about the case. But that won't carry us far. This petition with these names is a demonstration against game preserving and keepers' tyranny. What we want is the co-operation of a *neighbourhood*, especially of its leading citizens. However, I explained all this to you—there is no need to discuss it. Will you look at the list?'

Still holding it, he ran his finger over it, commenting here and there. She stood beside him; the sleeve of his gown brushed her black cloak; and under his perfect composure there beat a wild exultation in his power—without any apology, any forgiveness—to hold her there, alone with him, listening—her proud head stooped to his—her eye following his with this effort of anxious attention.

She made a few hurried remarks on the names, but her knowledge of the county was naturally not very serviceable. He folded up the paper and put it back.

'I think we understand,' he said. 'You will do what you can in the only quarter'—he spoke slowly—'that can really aid, and you will communicate with me at the House of Commons? I shall do what I can,

of course, when the moment comes, in Parliament, and meanwhile I shall start the matter in the Press—our best hope. The Radical papers are already taking it up.'

There was a sound of steps in the passage outside. A policeman opened the door, and Aldous Raeburn entered. His quick look ran over the two figures standing beside the table.

'I had some difficulty in finding a cab,' he explained, 'and we had to get some brandy; but she came round, and we got her off. I sent one of our men with her. The carriage is here.'

He spoke—to Marcella—with some formality. He was very pale, but there was both authority and tension in his bearing.

'I have been consulting with Miss Boyce,' said Wharton with equal distance of manner, 'as to the petition we are sending up to the Home Office.'

Aldous made no reply.

'One word, Miss Boyce,'—Wharton quietly turned to her. 'May I ask you to read the petition carefully, before you attempt to do anything with it? It lays stress on the *only* doubt that can reasonably be felt after the evidence, and after the judge's summing up. That particular doubt I hold to be entirely untouched by the trial; but it requires careful stating—the issues may easily be confused.'

'Will you come?' said Aldous to Marcella. What she chose to think the forced patience of his tone exasperated her.

'I will do everything I can,' she said in a low, distinct voice to Wharton. 'Good-bye.'

She held out her hand. To both the moment was one of infinite meaning; to her, in her high spiritual excitement, a sacrament of pardon and gratitude—expressed once for all—by this touch—in Aldous Raeburn's presence.

The two men nodded to each other. Wharton was already busy, putting his papers together.

'We shall meet next week, I suppose, in the House?' said Wharton casually. 'Good-night.'

'Will you take me to the Court?' said Marcella to Aldous, directly the door of the carriage was shut upon them, and, amid a gaping crowd that almost filled the little market-place of Widrington, the horses moved off. 'I told mamma that, if I did not come home, I should be with you, and that I should ask you to send me back from the Court to-night.'

She still held the packet Wharton had given her in her hand. As though for air, she had thrown back the black gauze veil she had worn all through the trial, and, as they passed through the lights of the town, Aldous could see in her face the signs—the plain, startling signs—of the effect of these weeks upon her. Pale, exhausted, yet showing in every movement the nervous excitement which was driving her on—his heart sank as he looked at her—foreseeing what was to come.

As soon as the main street had been left behind, he

put his head out of the window, and gave the coachman, who had been told to go to Mellor, the new order.

'Will you mind if I don't talk?' said Marcella, when he was again beside her. 'I think I am tired out, but I might rest now a little. When we get to the Court, will you ask Miss Raeburn to let me have some food in her sitting-room? Then, at nine o'clock or so, may I come down and see Lord Maxwell and you —together?'

What she said, and the manner in which she said it, could only add to his uneasiness; but he assented, put a cushion behind her, wrapped the rugs round her, and then sat silent, train after train of close and anxious thought passing through his mind as they rolled along the dark roads.

When they arrived at Maxwell Court, the sound of the carriage brought Lord Maxwell and Miss Raeburn at once into the hall.

Aldous went forward in front of Marcella. 'I have brought Marcella,' he said hastily to his aunt. 'Will you take her upstairs to your sitting-room, and let her have some food and rest? She is not fit for the exertion of dinner, but she wishes to speak to my grandfather afterwards.'

Lord Maxwell had already hurried to meet the black-veiled figure standing proudly in the dim light of the outer hall.

'My dear! my dear!' he said, drawing her arm within his, and patting her hand in fatherly fashion.

'How worn-out you look!—Yes, certainly—Agneta, take her up and let her rest—And you wish to speak to me afterwards? Of course, my dear, of course—at any time.'

Miss Raeburn, controlling herself absolutely, partly because of Aldous's manner, partly because of the servants, took her guest upstairs straightway, put her on the sofa in a cheerful sitting-room with a bright fire, and then, shrewdly guessing that she herself could not possibly be a congenial companion to the girl at such a moment, whatever might have happened or might be going to happen, she looked at her watch, said that she must go down to dinner, and promptly left her to the charge of a kind elderly maid, who was to do and get for her whatever she would.

Marcella made herself swallow some food and wine. Then she said that she wished to be alone and rest for an hour, and would come downstairs at nine o'clock. The maid, shocked by her pallor, was loth to leave her, but Marcella insisted.

When she was left alone she drew herself up to the fire and tried hard to get warm, as she had tried to eat. When in this way a portion of physical ease and strength had come back to her, she took out the petition from its envelope and read it carefully. As she did so her lip relaxed, her eye recovered something of its brightness. All the points that had occurred to her confusedly, amateurishly, throughout the day, were here thrown into luminous and admirable form. She

had listened to them indeed, as urged by Wharton in his concluding speech to the jury, but it had not, alas! seemed so marvellous to her then, as it did now, that, *after* such a plea, the judge should have summed up as he did.

When she had finished it and had sat thinking a while over the declining fire, an idea struck her. She took a piece of paper from Miss Raeburn's desk, and wrote on it:—

'Will you read this—and Lord Maxwell—before I come down? I forgot that you had not seen it. —M.'

A ring at the bell brought the maid.

'Will you please get this taken to Mr. Raeburn? And then, don't disturb me again for half an hour.'

And for that time she lay in Miss Raeburn's favourite chair, outwardly at rest. Inwardly she was ranging all her arguments, marshalling all her forces.

When the chiming clock in the great hall below struck nine, she got up and put the lamp for a moment on the mantelpiece, which held a mirror. She had already bathed her face and smoothed her hair. But she looked at herself again with attention, drew down the thick front waves of hair a little lower on the white brow, as she liked to have them, and once more straightened the collar and cuffs which were the only relief to her plain black dress.

The house as she stepped out into it seemed very still. Perfumed breaths of flowers and pot-pourri

ascended from the hall. The pictures along the walls as she passed were those same Caroline and early Georgian beauties that had so flashingly suggested her own future rule in this domain on the day when Aldous proposed to her.

She felt suddenly very shrinking and lonely as she went downstairs. The ticking of a large clock somewhere—the short, screaming note of Miss Raeburn's parrot in one of the ground-floor rooms—these sounds and the beating of her own heart seemed to have the vast house to themselves.

No!—that was a door opening—Aldous coming to fetch her. She drew a childish breath of comfort.

He sprang up the stairs, two or three steps at a time, as he saw her coming.

'Are you rested—were they good to you? Oh! my precious one!—how pale you are still! Will you come and see my grandfather now? He is quite ready.'

She let him lead her in. Lord Maxwell was standing by his writing-table, leaning over the petition which was open before him—one hand upon it. At sight of her he lifted his white head. His fine aquiline face was grave and disturbed. But nothing could have been kinder or more courtly than his manner as he came towards her.

'Sit down in that chair. Aldous, make her comfortable. Poor child, how tired she looks! I hear you wished to speak to me on this most unhappy, most miserable business.'

Marcella, who was sitting erect on the edge of the chair into which Aldous had put her, lifted her eyes with a sudden confidence. She had always liked Lord Maxwell.

'Yes,' she said, struggling to keep down eagerness and emotion. 'Yes, I came to bring you this petition, which is to be sent up to the Home Secretary on behalf of Jim Hurd, and—and—to *beg* of you and Aldous to sign it, if in any way you can. I know it will be difficult, but I thought I might—I might be able to suggest something to you—to convince you—as I have known these people so well—and it is very important to have your signatures.'

How crude it sounded—how mechanical! She felt that she had not yet command of herself. The strange place, the stately room, the consciousness of Aldous behind her—Aldous, who should have been on her side and was not—all combined to intimidate her.

Lord Maxwell's concern was evident. In the first place, he was painfully, unexpectedly struck by the change in the speaker. Why, what had Aldous been about? So thin! so frail and willowy in her black dress—monstrous!

'My dear,' he said, walking up to her and laying a fatherly hand on her shoulder. 'My dear, I wish I could make you understand how gladly I would do this, or anything else, for you, if I honourably could. I would do it for your sake and for your grandfather's sake. But—this is a matter of conscience, of public

duty, both for Aldous and myself. You will not surely *wish* even, that we should be governed in our relations to it by any private feeling or motive?'

'No, but I have had no opportunity of speaking to you about it—and I take such a different view from Aldous. He knows—everybody must know—that there is another side, another possible view from that which the judge took. You weren't in court to-day, were you, at all?'

'No. But I read all the evidence before the magistrates with great care, and I have just talked over the crucial points with Aldous, who followed everything to-day, as you know, and seems to have taken special note of Mr. Wharton's speeches.'

'Aldous!'—her voice broke irrepressibly into another note—'I thought he would have let me speak to you first!—to-night!'

Lord Maxwell, looking quickly at his grandson, was very sorry for him. Aldous bent over her chair.

'You remember,' he said, 'you sent down the petition. I thought that meant that we were to read and discuss it. I am very sorry.'

She tried to command herself, pressing her hand to her brow. But already she felt the irrevocable, and anger and despair were rising.

'The whole point lies in this,' she said, looking up: '*Can* we believe Hurd's own story? There is no evidence to corroborate it. I grant that—the judge did not believe it—and there is the evidence of hatred.

But is it not possible and conceivable all the same? He says that he did not go out with any thought whatever of killing Westall, but that when Westall came upon him with his stick up, threatening and abusing him, as he had done often before, in a fit of wild rage he shot at him. Surely, *surely* that is conceivable? There *is*—there *must* be a doubt; or, if it is murder, murder done in that way is quite, quite different from other kinds and degrees of murder.'

Now she possessed herself. The gift of flowing persuasive speech which was naturally hers, which the agitations, the debates of these weeks had been maturing, came to her call. She leant forward and took up the petition. One by one she went through its pleas, adding to them here and there from her own knowledge of Hurd and his peasant's life—presenting it all clearly, with great intellectual force, but in an atmosphere of emotion, of high pity, charged throughout with the 'tears of things.' To her, gradually, unconsciously, the whole matter—so sordid, commonplace, brutal in Lord Maxwell's eyes!—had become a tragic poem, a thing of fear and pity, to which her whole being vibrated. And as she conceived it, so she reproduced it. Wharton's points were there indeed, but so were Hurd's poverty, Hurd's deformity, Hurd as the boyish victim of a tyrant's insults, the miserable wife, the branded children—emphasised, all of them, by the occasional quiver, quickly steadied again, of the girl's voice.

Lord Maxwell sat by his writing-table, his head

resting on his hand, one knee crossed over the other. Aldous still hung over her chair. Neither interrupted her. Once the eyes of the two men met over her head—a distressed, significant look. Aldous heard all she said, but what absorbed him mainly was the wild desire to kiss the dark hair, so close below him, alternating with the miserable certainty that for him at that moment to touch, to soothe her, was to be repulsed.

When her voice broke—when she had said all she could think of—she remained looking imploringly at Lord Maxwell.

He was silent a little ; then he stooped forward and took her hand.

'You have spoken,' he said with great feeling, 'most nobly—most well—like a good woman, with a true compassionate heart. But all these things you have said are not new to me, my dear child. Aldous warned me of this petition—he has pressed upon me, still more I am sure upon himself, all that he conceived to be your view of the case—the view of those who are now moving in the matter. But with the best will in the world I cannot, and I believe that he cannot—though he must speak for himself—I cannot take that view. In my belief Hurd's act was murder, and deserves the penalty of murder. I have paid some attention to these things. I was a practising barrister in my youth, and later I was for two years Home Secretary. I will explain to you my grounds very shortly.'

And, bending forward, he gave the reasons for his

judgment of the case as carefully and as lucidly as though he were stating them to a fellow-expert, and not to an agitated girl of twenty-one. Both in words and manner there was an implied tribute, not only to Marcella, but perhaps to that altered position of the woman in our moving world which affects so many things and persons in unexpected ways.

Marcella listened, restlessly. She had drawn her hand away, and was twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. The flush that had sprung up while she was talking had died away. She grew whiter and whiter. When Lord Maxwell ceased, she said quickly, and as he thought unreasonably—

'So you will not sign?'

'No,' he replied firmly, 'I cannot sign. Holding the conviction about the matter I do, I should be giving my name to statements I do not believe; and in order to give myself the pleasure of pleasing you, and of indulging the pity that every man must feel for every murderer's wife and children, I should be not only committing a public wrong, but I should be doing what I could to lessen the safety and security of one whole class of my servants—men who give me honourable service—and two of whom have been so cruelly, so wantonly hurried before their Maker!'

His voice gave the first sign of his own deep and painful feeling on the matter. Marcella shivered.

'Then,' she said slowly, 'Hurd will be executed.'

Lord Maxwell had a movement of impatience.

'Let me tell you,' he said, 'that that does not follow at all. There is *some* importance in signatures—or rather in the local movement that the signatures imply. It enables a case to be reopened, which, in any event, this case is sure to be. But any Home Secretary who could decide a murder case on any other grounds whatever than those of law and his own conscience would not deserve his place a day—an hour! Believe me, you mistake the whole situation.'

He spoke slowly, with the sharp emphasis natural to his age and authority. Marcella did not believe him. Every nerve was beginning to throb anew with that passionate recoil against tyranny and prejudice, which was in itself an agony.

'And you say the same?' she said, turning to Aldous.

'I cannot sign that petition,' he said sadly. 'Won't you try and believe what it costs me to refuse?'

It was a heavy blow to her. Amply as she had been prepared for it, there had always been at the bottom of her mind a persuasion that in the end she would get her way. She had been used to feel barriers go down before that ultimate power of personality of which she was abundantly conscious. Yet it had not availed her here—not even with the man who loved her.

Lord Maxwell looked at the two—the man's face of suffering, the girl's struggling breath.

'There, there, Aldous!' he said, rising. 'I will leave you a minute. Do make Marcella rest—get her,

for all our sakes, to forget this a little. Bring her in presently to us for some coffee. Above all, persuade her that we love her and admire her with all our hearts, but that in a matter of this kind she must leave us to do—as before God!—what we think right.'

He stood before her an instant, gazing down upon her with dignity—nay, a certain severity. Then he turned away and left the room.

Marcella sprang up.

'Will you order the carriage?' she said in a strangled voice. 'I will go upstairs.'

'Marcella!' cried Aldous; 'can you not be just to me, if it is impossible for you to be generous?'

'Just!' she repeated, with a tone and gesture of repulsion, pushing him back from her. '*You* can talk of justice!'

He tried to speak, stammered, and failed. That strange paralysis of the will-forces which dogs the man of reflection at the moment when he must either take his world by storm or lose it was upon him now. He had never loved her more passionately—but as he stood there looking at her, something broke within him, the first prescience of the inevitable dawned.

'*You*,' she said again, walking stormily to and fro, and catching at her breath—'*You*, in this house, with this life—to talk of justice—the justice that comes of slaying a man like Hurd! And I must go back to that cottage, to that woman, and tell her there is *no* hope—none. Because *you* must follow your conscience—you

who have everything! Oh! I would not have your conscience—I wish you a heart—rather! Don't come to me, please! Oh! I must think how it can be. Things cannot go on so. I should kill myself, and make you miserable. But now I must go to *her*—to the *poor*—to those whom I *love*, whom I carry in my heart!'

She broke off sobbing. He saw her, in her wild excitement, look round the splendid room as though she would wither it to ruin with one fiery, accusing glance.

'You are very scornful of wealth,' he said, catching her wrists, 'but one thing you have no right to scorn! —the man who has given you his inmost heart—and now only asks you to believe in this, that he is not the cruel hypocrite you are determined to make him!'

His face quivered in every feature. She was checked a moment—checked by the moral compulsion of his tone and manner, as well as by his words. But again she tore herself away.

'*Please* go and order the carriage,' she said. 'I cannot bear any more. I *must* go home and rest. Some day I will ask your pardon—oh! for this—and—and—' she was almost choked again—'other things. But now I must go away. There is someone who will help me. I must not forget that!'

The reckless words, the inflection, turned Aldous to stone. Unconsciously he drew himself proudly

erect—their eyes met. Then he went up to the bell and rang it.

'The brougham at once, for Miss Boyce. Will you have a maid to go with you?' he asked, motioning the servant to stay till Miss Boyce had given her answer.

'No, thank you. I must go and put on my things. Will you explain to Miss Raeburn?'

The footman opened the door for her. She went.

CHAPTER XIV

'BUT this is unbearable!' said Aldous. 'Do you mean to say that she is at home and that she will not see me?'

Mrs. Boyce's self-possession was shaken for once by the flushed humiliation of the man before her.

'I am afraid it is so,' she said hurriedly. 'I remonstrated with Marcella, but I could do nothing. I think, if you are wise, you will not for the present attempt to see her.'

Aldous sat down, with his hat in his hand, staring at the floor. After a few moments' silence he looked up again.

'And she gave you no message for me?'

'No,' said Mrs. Boyce reluctantly. 'Only that she could not bear to see anybody from the Court, even you, while this matter was still undecided.'

Aldous's eye travelled round the Mellor drawing-room. It was arrested by a chair beside him. On it lay an envelope addressed to Miss Boyce, of which the handwriting seemed to him familiar. A needle with some black silk hanging from it had been thrust into the stuffed arm of the chair, the cushion at the back

still bore the imprint of the sitter. She had been there, not three minutes ago, and had fled before him. The door into Mrs. Boyce's sitting-room was still ajar.

He looked again at the envelope on the chair, and recognised the writing. Walking across to where Mrs. Boyce sat, he took a seat beside her.

'Will you tell me,' he said steadily—'I think you will admit I have a right to know—is Marcella in constant correspondence now with Henry Wharton?'

Mrs. Boyce's start was not perceptible.

'I believe so,' she quickly replied. 'So far as I can judge, he writes to her almost every other day.'

'Does she show you his letters?'

'Very often. They are entirely concerned with his daily interviews and efforts on Hurd's behalf.'

'Would you not say,' he asked, after another pause, raising his clear grey eyes to her, 'that since his arrival here in December Marcella's whole views and thoughts have been largely—perhaps vitally—influenced by this man?'

Mrs. Boyce had long expected questions of this kind—had, indeed, often marvelled and cavilled that Aldous had not asked them weeks before. Now that they were put to her she was, first of all, anxious to treat them with common sense, and as much plain truth as might be fair to both parties. The perpetual emotion in which Marcella lived tired and oppressed the mother. For herself she asked to see things in a dry light. Yet she knew well that the moment was

critical. Her feeling was more mixed than it had been. On the whole it was indignantly on Aldous's side—with qualifications and impatiences, however.

She took up her embroidery again before she answered him. In her opinion the needle is to the woman what the cigarette is to the diplomatist.

'Yes, certainly,' she said at last. 'He has done a great deal to form her opinions. He has made her both read and think on all those subjects she has so long been fond of talking about.'

She saw Aldous wince; but she had her reasons for being plain with him.

'Has there been nothing else than that in it?' said Aldous in an odd voice.

Mrs. Boyce tried no evasions. She looked at him straight, her slight, energetic head, with its pale gold hair lit up by the March sun behind her.

'I do not know,' she said calmly; 'that is the real truth. I *think* there is nothing else. But let me tell you what more I think.'

Aldous laid his hand on hers for an instant. In his pity and liking for her he had once or twice allowed himself this quasi-filial freedom.

'If you would,' he entreated.

'Leave Marcella quite alone—for the present. She is not herself—not normal, in any way. Nor will she be till this dreadful thing is over. But when it is over, and she has had time to recover a little, *then*'—her thin voice expressed all the emphasis it could—'*then*

assert yourself! Ask her that question you have asked me—and get your answer.'

He understood. Her advice to him, and the tone of it, implied that she had not always thought highly of his powers of self-defence in the past. But there was a proud and sensitive instinct in him which both told him that he could not have done differently and forbade him to explain.

'You have come from London to-day?' said Mrs. Boyce, changing the subject. All intimate and personal conversation was distasteful to her, and she admitted few responsibilities. Her daughter hardly counted among them.

'Yes; London is hard at work cabinet-making,' he said, trying to smile. 'I must get back to-night.'

'I don't know how you could be spared,' said Mrs. Boyce.

He paused; then he broke out: 'When a man is in the doubt and trouble I am, he must be spared. Indeed, since the night of the trial, I feel as though I had been of very little use to any human being.'

He spoke simply, but every word touched her. What an inconceivable entanglement the whole thing was! Yet she was no longer merely contemptuous of it.

'Look!' she said, lifting a bit of black stuff from the ground beside the chair which held the envelope; 'she is already making the mourning for the children. I can see she despairs.'

He made a sound of horror.

'Can you do nothing?' he cried reproachfully. 'To think of her dwelling upon this—nothing but this, day and night—and I, banished and powerless!'

He buried his head in his hands.

'No, I can do nothing,' said Mrs. Boyce deliberately. Then, after a pause, 'You do not imagine there is any chance of success for her?'

He looked up and shook his head.

'The Radical papers are full of it, as you know. Wharton is managing it with great ability, and has got some good supporters in the House. But I happened to see the judge the day before yesterday, and I certainly gathered from him that the Home Office was likely to stand firm. There may be some delay. The new ministry will not kiss hands till Saturday. But no doubt it will be the first business of the new Home Secretary.—By the way, I had rather Marcella did not hear of my seeing Judge Cartwright,' he added hastily —almost imploringly 'I could not bear that she should suppose——'

Mrs. Boyce thought to herself indignantly that she never could have imagined such a man in such a plight.

'I must go,' he said, rising. 'Will you tell her from me,' he added slowly, 'that I could never have believed she would be so unkind as to let me come down from London to see her, and send me away empty—without a word?'

'Leave it to my discretion,' said Mrs. Boyce, smiling and looking up. 'Oh, by the way, she told me to thank you. Mr. Wharton, in his letter this morning, mentioned that you had given him two introductions which were important to him. She specially wished you to be thanked for it.'

His exclamation had a note of impatient contempt that Mrs. Boyce was genuinely glad to hear. In her opinion he was much too apt to forget that the world yields itself only to the 'violent.'

He walked away from the house without once looking back. Marcella, from her window, watched him go.

'How *could* she see him?' she asked herself passionately, both then and on many other occasions during these rushing, ghastly days. His turn would come, and it should be amply given him. But *now* the very thought of that half-hour in Lord Maxwell's library threw her into wild tears. The time for entreaty—for argument—was gone by, so far as he was concerned. He might have been her champion, and would not. She threw herself recklessly, madly into the encouragement and support of the man who had taken up the task which, in her eyes, should have been her lover's. It had become to her a *fight*—with society, with the law, with Aldous—in which her whole nature was absorbed. In the course of the fight she had realised Aldous's strength, and it was a bitter offence to her.

How little she could do after all! She gathered together all the newspapers that were debating the case, and feverishly read every line; she wrote to Wharton, commenting on what she read, and on his letters; she attended the meetings of the Reprieve Committee which had been started at Widrington; and she passed hours of every day with Minta Hurd and her children. She would hardly speak to Mary Harden and the rector, because they had not signed the petition, and at home her relations with her father were much strained. Mr. Boyce was awakening to a good deal of alarm as to how things might end. He might not like the Raeburns, but that anything should come in the way of his daughter's match was, notwithstanding, the very last thing in the world, as he soon discovered, that he really desired. During six months he had taken it for granted; so had the county. He, of all men, could not afford to be made ridiculous, apart from the solid, the extraordinary advantages of the matter. He thought Marcella a foolish, unreasonable girl, and was not the less in a panic because his wife let him understand that he had had a good deal to do with it. So that between him and his daughter there were now constant sparrings—sparrings which degraded Marcella in her own eyes, and contributed not a little to make her keep away from home.

The one place where she breathed freely, where the soul had full course, was in Minta Hurd's kitchen. Side by side with that piteous plaintive misery, her

own fierceness dwindled. She would sit with little Willie on her knees in the dusk of the spring evenings, looking into the fire, and crying silently. She never suspected that her presence was often a burden and constraint, not only to the sulky sister-in-law but to the wife herself. While Miss Boyce was there, the village kept away; and Mrs. Hurd was sometimes athirst, without knowing it, for homelier speech and simpler consolations than any Marcella could give her.

The last week arrived. Wharton's letters grew more uncertain and despondent; the Radical press fought on with added heat as the cause became more desperate. On Monday the wife went to see the condemned man, who told her not to be so silly as to imagine there was any hope. Tuesday night, Wharton asked his last question in Parliament. Friday was the date fixed for the execution.

The question in Parliament came on late. The Home Secretary's answer, though not final in form, was final in substance. Wharton went out immediately and wrote to Marcella. 'She will not sleep if I telegraph to-night,' he thought, with that instinct for detail, especially for physical detail, which had in it something of the woman. But, knowing that his letter could not reach her by the early post with the stroke of eight next morning, he sent out his telegram, that she might not learn the news first from the papers.

Marcella had wandered out before breakfast, feeling the house an oppression, and knowing that, one way or another, the last news might reach her any hour.

She had just passed through the little wood behind and alongside of the house, and was in a field beyond, when she heard someone running behind her. William handed her the telegram, his own red face full of understanding. Marcella took it, commanded herself till the boy was out of sight and hearing again, then sank down on the grass to read it.

'All over. The Home Secretary's official refusal to interfere with sentence sent to Widrington to-day. Accept my sorrow and sympathy.'

She crushed it in her hand, raising her head mechanically. Before her lay that same shallow cup of ploughed land stretching from her father's big wood to the downs, on the edge of which Hurd had plied his ferrets in the winter nights. But to-day the spring worked in it, and breathed upon it. The young corn was already green in the furrows; the hazel-catkins quivered in the hedge above her; larks were in the air, daisies in the grass, and the march of sunny clouds could be seen in the flying shadows they flung on the pale greens and sheeny purples of the wide treeless basin.

Human helplessness, human agony—set against the careless joy of nature—there is no new way of feeling these things. But not to have felt them, and with the mad, impotent passion and outcry which filled Marcella's

heart at this moment, is never to have risen to the full stature of our kind.

'Marcella, it is my strong wish—my command—that you do *not* go out to the village to-night.'

'I must go, papa.'

It was Thursday night—the night before the Friday morning fixed for Hurd's execution. Dinner at Mellor was just over. Mr. Boyce, who was standing in front of the fire, unconsciously making the most of his own inadequate height and size, looked angrily at his stately daughter. She had not appeared at dinner, and she was now dressed in the long black cloak and black hat she had worn so constantly in the last few weeks. Mr. Boyce detested the garb.

'You are making yourself *ridiculous*, Marcella. Pity for these wretched people is all very well, but you have no business to carry it to such a point that you—and we—become the talk, the laughing-stock of the county. And I should like to see you, too, pay some attention to Aldous Raeburn's feelings and wishes.'

The admonition, in her father's mouth, would almost have made her laugh, if she could have laughed at anything. But, instead, she only repeated:—

'I must go; I have explained to mamma.'

'Evelyn! why do you permit it?' cried Mr. Boyce, turning aggressively to his wife.

'Marcella explained to me, as she truly said,'

replied Mrs. Boyce, looking up calmly. 'It is not her habit to ask permission of anyone.'

'Mamma,' exclaimed the girl, in her deep voice, 'you would not wish to stop me?'

'No,' said Mrs. Boyce, after a pause. 'No. You have gone so far, I understand your wish to do this. Richard'—she got up and went to him—'don't excite yourself about it; shall I read to you, or play a game with you?'

He looked at her, trembling with anger. But her quiet eye warned him that he had had threatenings of pain that afternoon. His anger sank into fear. He became once more irritable and abject.

'Let her gang her gait,' he said, throwing himself into a chair. 'But I tell you I shall not put up with this kind of thing much longer, Marcella.'

'I shall not ask you, papa,' she said steadily, as she moved towards the door. Mrs. Boyce paused where she stood, and looked after her daughter, struck by her words. Mr. Boyce simply took them as referring to the marriage which would emancipate her before long from any control of his, and fumed, without finding a reply.

The maid-servant who, by Mrs. Boyce's orders, was to accompany Marcella to the village, was already at the front door. She carried a basket containing invalid food for little Willie, and a lighted lantern.

It was a dark night and raining fast. Marcella was fastening up her tweed skirt in the hall, when she saw Mrs. Boyce hurry along the gallery above, and

immediately afterwards her mother came across the hall to her.

'You had better take the shawl, Marcella: it is cold and raw. If you are going to sit up most of the night you will want it.'

She put a wrap of her own across Marcella's arm.

'Your father is quite right,' she went on. 'You have had one horrible experience to-day already——'

'Don't, mamma!' exclaimed Marcella, interrupting her. Then suddenly she threw her arms round her mother.

'Kiss me, mamma! please kiss me!'

Mrs. Boyce kissed her gravely, and let herself even linger a moment in the girl's strong hold.

'You are extraordinarily wilful,' she said. 'And it is so strange to me that you think you do any good. Are you sure even that she wants to have you?'

Marcella's lip quivered. She could not speak, apparently. Waving her hand to her mother, she joined the maid waiting for her, and the two disappeared into the blackness.

'But *does* it do any good?' Mrs. Boyce repeated to herself as she went back to the drawing-room. '*Sympathy!* who was ever yet fed, warmed, comforted by *sympathy?* Marcella robs that woman of the only thing that the human being should want at such a moment—solitude. Why should we force on the poor what to us would be an outrage?'

Meanwhile Marcella battled through the wind and

rain, thankful that the warm spring burst was over, and that the skies no longer mocked this horror which was beneath them.

At the entrance to the village she stopped, and took the basket from the little maid.

'Now, Ruth, you can go home. Run quick, it is so dark, Ruth!'

'Yes, Miss.'

The young country girl trembled. Miss Boyce's tragic passion in this matter had to some extent infected the whole household in which she lived.

'Ruth, when you say your prayers to-night, pray God to comfort the poor,—and to punish the cruel!'

'Yes, Miss,' said the girl timidly, and ready to cry. The lantern she held flashed its light on Miss Boyce's white face and tall form. Till her mistress turned away she did not dare to move; that dark eye, so wide, full, and living, roused in her a kind of terror.

On the steps of the cottage Marcella paused. She heard voices inside — or rather the rector's voice reading.

A thought of scorn rose in her heart. 'How long will the poor endure this religion—this make-believe—which preaches patience, *patience!* when it ought to be urging war?'

But she went in softly, so as not to interrupt. The rector looked up and made a grave sign of the head as she entered; her own gesture forbade any other movement in the group; she took a stool beside Willie,

whose makeshift bed of chairs and pillows stood on one side of the fire; and the reading went on.

Since Minta Hurd had returned with Marcella from Widrington Gaol that afternoon, she had been so ill that a doctor had been sent for. He had bade them make up her bed downstairs in the warm; and accordingly a mattress had been laid on the settle, and she was now stretched upon it. Her huddled form, the staring whiteness of the narrow face and closed eyelids, thrown out against the dark oak of the settle, and the disordered mass of grizzled hair, made the centre of the cottage.

Beside her on the floor sat Mary Harden, her head bowed over the rough hand she held, her eyes red with weeping. Fronting them, beside a little table, which held a small paraffin lamp, sat the young rector, his Testament in his hand, his slight boy's figure cast in sharp shadow on the cottage wall. He had placed himself so as to screen the crude light of the lamp from the wife's eyes; and an old skirt had been hung over a chair to keep it from little Willie. Between mother and child sat Ann Mullins, rocking herself to and fro over the fire, and groaning from time to time—a shapeless sullen creature, brutalised by many children and much poverty— of whom Marcella was often impatient.

'*And he said, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom. And He said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*'

The rector's voice, in its awed monotony, dwelt

insistently on each word, then paused. '*To-day*,' whispered Mary, caressing Minta's hand, while the tears streamed down her cheeks; 'he repented, Minta, and the Lord took him to Himself—at once—forgiving all his sins.'

Mrs. Hurd gave no sign, but the dark figure on the other side of the cottage made an involuntary movement, which threw down a fire-iron, and sent a start through Willie's wasted body. The reader resumed; but perfect spontaneity was somehow lost both for him and for Mary. Marcella's stormy presence worked in them both, like a troubling leaven.

Nevertheless, the priest went steadily through his duty, dwelling on every pang of the Passion, putting together every sacred and sublime word. For centuries on centuries his brethren and forerunners had held up the Man of Sorrows before the anguished and the dying; his turn had come, his moment and place in the marvellous, never-ending task; he accepted it with the meek ardour of an undoubting faith.

'*And all the multitudes that came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned, smiting their breasts.*'

He closed the book, and bent forward, so as to bring his voice close to the wife's ear.

'So He died—the Sinless and the Just—for you, for your husband. He has passed through death—through cruel death; and where He has gone, we poor, weak, stained sinners can follow,—holding to Him. No sin,

however black, can divide us from Him, can tear us from His hand in the dark waters, if it be only repented, —thrown upon His Cross. Let us pray for your husband, let us implore the Lord's mercy this night—this hour !— upon his soul.'

A shudder of remembrance passed through Marcella. The rector knelt; Mrs. Hurd lay motionless, save for deep gasps of struggling breath at intervals; Ann Mullins sobbed loudly; and Mary Harden wept as she prayed, lost in a mystical vision of the Lord Himself among them—there on the cottage floor—stretching hands of pity over the woman beside her, showing His marred side and brow.

Marcella alone sat erect, her whole being one passionate protest against a faith which could thus heap all the crimes and responsibilities of this too real earth on the shadowy head of one far-off Redeemer. 'This very man who prays,' she thought, 'is in some sort an accomplice of those who, after tempting, are now destroying, and killing, because they know of nothing better to do with the life they themselves have made outcast.'

And she hardened her heart.

When the spoken prayer was over, Mr. Harden still knelt on silently for some minutes. So did Mary. In the midst of the hush, Marcella saw the boy's eyes unclose. He looked with a sort of remote wonder at his mother and the figures beside her. Then suddenly the gaze became eager, concrete; he sought for some-

thing. Her eye followed his, and she perceived in the shadow beside him, on a broken chair placed behind the rough screen which had been made for him, the four tiny animals of pinched paper Wharton had once fashioned. She stooped noiselessly and moved the chair a little forward that he might see them better. The child with difficulty turned his wasted head, and lay with his skeleton hand under his cheek, staring at his treasures—his little all—with just a gleam, a faint gleam, of that same exquisite content which had fascinated Wharton. Then, for the first time that day, Marcella could have wept.

At last the rector and his sister rose.

'God be with you, Mrs. Hurd,' said Mr. Harden, stooping to her; 'God support you!'

His voice trembled. Mrs. Hurd in bewilderment looked up.

'Oh, Mr. Harden!' she cried with a sudden wail. 'Mr. Harden!'

Mary bent over her with tears, trying to still her, speaking again with quivering lips of 'the dear Lord,' 'the Saviour.'

The rector turned to Marcella.

'You are staying the night with her?' he asked, under his breath.

'Yes. Mrs. Mullins was up all last night. I offered to come to-night.'

'You went with her to the prison to-day, I believe?'

'Yes.'

'Did you see Hurd?'

'For a very few minutes.'

'Did you hear anything of his state of mind?' he asked anxiously. 'Is he penitent?'

'He talked to me of Willie,' she said—a fierce humanness in her unfriendly eyes. 'I promised him that when the child died, he should be buried respectably—not by the parish. And I told him I would always look after the little girls.'

The rector sighed. He moved away. Then unexpectedly he came back again.

'I must say it to you,' he said, firmly, but still so low as not to be heard by anyone else in the cottage. 'You are taking a great responsibility here to-night. Let me implore you not to fill that poor woman with thoughts of bitterness and revenge at such a moment of her life. That *you* feel bitterly I know. Mary has explained to me—but ask yourself, I beg of you!—how is *she* to be helped through her misery, either now or in the future, except by patience and submission to the will of God?'

He had never made so long a speech to this formidable parishioner of his, and his young cheek glowed with the effort.

'You must leave me to do what I think best,' said Marcella coldly. She felt herself wholly set free from that sort of moral compulsion which his holiness of mind and character had once exerted upon her. That hate-

ful opinion of his, which Mary had reported, had broken the spell once for all.

Mary did not venture to kiss her friend. They all went. Ann Mullins, who was dropping as much with sleep as grief, shuffled off last. When she was going, Mrs. Hurd seemed to rouse a little, and held her by the skirt, saying incoherent things.

'Dear Mrs. Hurd,' said Marcella, kneeling down beside her, 'won't you let Ann go? I am going to spend the night here, and take care of you and Willie.'

Mrs. Hurd gave a painful start.

'You're very good, Miss,' she said, half-consciously, 'very good, I'm sure. But she's his own flesh and blood is Ann—his own flesh and blood. Ann!'

The two women clung together, the rough, ill-tempered sister-in-law muttering what soothing she could think of. When she was gone, Minta Hurd turned her face to the back of the settle and moaned, her hands clenched under her breast.

Marcella went about her preparations for the night. 'She is extremely weak,' Dr. Clarke had said; 'the heart in such a state she may die of syncope on very small provocation. If she is to spend the night in crying and exciting herself, it will go hard with her. Get her to sleep if you possibly can.'

And he had left a sleeping draught. Marcella resolved that she would persuade her to take it. 'But I will wake her before eight o'clock,' she thought. 'No

human being has the right to rob her of herself through that last hour.'

And tenderly she coaxed Minta to take the doctor's 'medicine.' Minta swallowed it submissively, asking no questions. But the act of taking it roused her for the time, and she would talk. She even got up and tottered across to Willie.

'Willie!—Willie!—Oh! look, Miss, he's got his animals—he don't think of nothing else. Oh, Willie! won't you think of your father?—you'll never have a father, Willie, not after to-night!'

The boy was startled by her appearance there beside him—his haggard, dishevelled mother, with the dews of perspiration standing on the face, and her black dress thrown open at the throat and breast for air. He looked at her, and a little frown lined the white brow. But he did not speak. Marcella thought he was too weak to speak, and for an instant it struck her with a thrill of girlish fear that he was dying then and there—that night—that hour. But when she had half helped, half forced Mrs. Hurd back to bed again, and had returned to him, his eyelids had fallen, he seemed asleep. The fast, whistling breath was much the same as it had been for days; she reassured herself.

And at last the wife slept too. The narcotic seized her. The aching limbs relaxed, and all was still. Marcella, stooping over her, kissed the shoulder of her dress for very joy, so grateful to every sense of the

watcher was the sudden lull in the long activity of anguish.

Then she sat down in the rocking chair by the fire, yielding herself with a momentary relief to the night and the silence. The tall clock showed that it was not yet ten. She had brought a book with her, and she drew it upon her knee; but it lay unopened.

A fretting, gusty wind beat against the window, with occasional rushes of rain. Marcella shivered, though she had built up the fire, and put on her cloak.

A few distant sounds from the village street round the corner, the chiming of the church clock, the crackling of the fire close beside her—she heard everything there was to hear, with unusual sharpness of ear, and imagined more.

All at once restlessness, or some undefined impression, made her look round her. She saw that the scanty baize curtain was only half-drawn across one of the windows, and she got up to close it. Fresh from the light of the lamp, she stared through the panes into the night without at first seeing anything. Then there flashed out upon the dark the door of a public-house to the right, the last in the village road. A man came out stumbling and reeling; the light within streamed out an instant on the road and the common; then the pursuing rain and darkness fell upon him.

She was drawing back when, with sudden horror, she perceived something else close beside her, pressing against the window. A woman's face!—the powerful

black and white of it—the strong aquiline features—the mad keenness of the look—were all plain to her. The eyes looked in hungrily at the prostrate form on the settle—at the sleeping child. Another figure appeared out of the dark, running up the path. There was a slight scuffle, and voices outside. Marcella drew the curtain close with a hasty hand, and sat down hardly able to breathe. The woman who had looked in was Isabella Westall. It was said that she was becoming more and more difficult to manage and to watch.

Marcella was some time in recovering herself. That look, as of a sleepless, hateful eagerness, clung to the memory. Once or twice, as it haunted her, she got up again to make sure that the door was fast.

The incident, with all it suggested, did but intensify the horror and struggle in which the girl stood, made her mood more strained, more piercingly awake and alert. Gradually, as the hours passed, as all sounds from without, even that of the wind, died away, and the silence settled round her in ever-widening circles, like deep waters sinking to repose, Marcella felt herself a naked soul, alone on a wide sea, with shapes of pain and agony and revolt. She looked at the sleeping wife. 'He, too, is probably asleep,' she thought, remembering some information which a kindly warder had given her in a few jerky, well-meant sentences, while she was waiting downstairs in the gaol for Minta Hurd. 'Incredible! only so many hours, minutes left—so far as any mortal *knows* —of living, thinking, recollecting, of all that makes us

something as against the *nothing* of death—and a man wastes them in sleep, in that which is only meant for the ease and repair of the daily struggle. And Minta—her husband is her all—to-morrow she will have no husband; yet she sleeps, and I have helped to make her. Ah! Nature may well despise and trample on us; there is no reason in us—no dignity! Oh, why are we here—why am *I* here—to ache like this—to hate good people like Charles Harden and Mary—to refuse all I could give—to madden myself over pain I can never help? I cannot help it, yet I cannot forsake it; it drives, it clings to me!'

She sat over the fire, Willie's hand clasped in hers. He alone in this forlorn household *loved* her. Mrs. Hurd and the other children feared and depended on her. This creature of thistle-down—this little thread and patch of humanity—felt no fear of her. It was as though his weakness divined through her harshness and unripeness those maternal and protecting powers with which her nature was in truth so richly dowered. He confided himself to her with no misgivings. He was at ease when she was there.

Little piteous hand!—its touch was to her symbolic, imperative.

Eight months had she been at Mellor? And that Marcella, who had been living and moving amid these woods and lanes all this time—that foolish girl, delighting in new grandeurs, and flattered by Aldous Raeburn's attentions—that hot, ambitious person, who had meant

to rule a county through a husband—what had become of her? Up to the night of Hurd's death-sentence she had still existed in some sort, with her obligations, qualms, remorses. But since then—every day, every hour had been grinding, scorching her away—fashioning in flame and fever this new Marcella who sat here, looking impatiently into another life, which should know nothing of the bonds of the old.

Ah, yes!—her *thought* could distinguish between the act and the man, between the man and his class; but in her *feeling* all was confounded. This awful growth of sympathy in her—strange irony!—had made all sympathy for Aldous Raeburn impossible to her. Marry him?—no! no!—never! But she would make it quite easy to him to give her up. Pride should come in—he should feel no pain in doing it. She had in her pocket the letter she had received from him that afternoon. She had hardly been able to read it. Ear and heart were alike dull to it.

From time to time she probably slept in her chair. Or else it was the perpetual rush of images and sensations through the mind that hastened the hours. Once when the first streaks of the March dawn were showing through the curtains Minta Hurd sprang up with a loud cry:—

'Oh, my God! Jim, *Jim*! Oh, no!—take that off. Oh, *please*, sir, please! Oh, for God's sake, sir!'

Agony struggled with sleep. Marcella, shuddering, held and soothed her, and for a while sleep, or rather

the drug in her veins, triumphed again. For another hour or two she lay restlessly tossing from side to side, but unconscious.

Willie hardly moved all night. Again and again Marcella held beef-tea or milk to his mouth, and tried to rouse him to take it, but she could make no impression on the passive lips; the sleeping serenity of the brow never changed.

At last, with a start, Marcella looked round and saw that the morning was fully there. A cold light was streaming through the curtains; the fire was still glowing; but her limbs were stiff and chilled under her shawl. She sprang up, horror descending on her. Her shaking fingers could hardly draw out the watch in her belt.

Ten minutes to eight!

For the first time the girl felt nerve and resolution fail her. She looked at Mrs. Hurd and wrung her hands. The mother was muttering and moving, but not yet fully awake; and Willie lay as before. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she drew the curtains back, as though inspiration might come with the light. The rain-clouds trailed across the common; water dripped heavily from the thatch of the cottage; and a few birds twittered from some bedraggled larches at the edge of the common. Far away, beyond and beneath those woods to the right, Widrington lay on the plain, with that high-walled stone building at its edge. She saw everything as it must now be happening as

plainly as though she were bodily present there—the last meal—the pinioning—the chaplain.

Goaded by the passing seconds, she turned back at last to wake that poor sleeper behind her. But something diverted her. With a start she saw that Willie's eyes were open.

'Willie,' she said, running to him, 'how are you, dear? Shall I lift your head a little?'

He did not answer, though she thought he tried, and she was struck by the blueness under the eyes and nose. Hurriedly she felt his tiny feet. They were quite cold.

'Mrs. Hurd!' she cried, rousing her in haste; 'dear Mrs. Hurd, come and see Willie!'

The mother sprang up bewildered, and, hurrying across the room, threw herself upon him.

'Willie, what is it ails you, dear? Tell mother! Is it your feet are so cold? But we'll rub them—we'll get you warm soon. And here's something to make you better.' Marcella handed her some brandy. 'Drink it, dear; drink it, sweetheart!' Her voice grew shrill.

'He can't,' said Marcella. 'Do not let us plague him; it is the end. Dr. Clarke said it would come in the morning.'

They hung over him, forgetting everything but him for the moment—the only moment in his little life he came first even with his mother.

There was a slight movement of the hand.

'He wants his animals,' said Marcella, the tears

pouring down her cheeks. She lifted them and put them on his breast, laying the cold fingers over them.

Then he tried to speak.

'Daddy!' he whispered, looking up fully at his mother; 'take 'em to Daddy!'

She fell on her knees beside him with a shriek, hiding her face, and shaking from head to foot. Marcella alone saw the slight, mysterious smile, the gradual sinking of the lids, the shudder of departing life that ran through the limbs.

A heavy sound swung through the air—a heavy repeated sound. Mrs. Hurd held up her head and listened. The church clock tolled eight. She knelt there, struck motionless by terror—by recollection.

'Oh, Jim!' she said, under her breath—'my Jim!'

The plaintive tone—as of a creature that has not even breath and strength left wherewith to chide the fate that crushes it—broke Marcella's heart. Sitting beside the dead son, she wrapt the mother in her arms, and the only words that even her wild spirit could find wherewith to sustain this woman through the moments of her husband's death were words of prayer—the old shuddering cries wherewith the human soul from the beginning has thrown itself on that awful encompassing Life whence it issued, and whither it returns.

CHAPTER XV.

Two days later, in the afternoon, Aldous Raeburn found himself at the door of Mellor. When he entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Boyce, who had heard his ring, was hurrying away.

'Don't go,' he said, detaining her with a certain peremptoriness. 'I want all the light on this I can get. Tell me, she has *actually* brought herself to regard this man's death as in some sort my doing—as something which ought to separate us?'

Mrs. Boyce saw that he held an opened letter from Marcella crushed in his hand. But she did not need the explanation. She had been expecting him at any hour throughout the day, and in just this condition of mind.

'Marcella must explain for herself,' she said, after a moment's thought. 'I have no right whatever to speak for her. Besides, frankly, I do not understand her, and when I argue with her she only makes me realise that I have no part or lot in her—that I never had. It is just enough. She was brought up away from me. And I have no natural hold. I cannot help you, or anyone else, with her.'

Aldous had been very tolerant and compassionate in the past of this strange mother's abdication of her maternal place, and of its probable causes. But it was not in human nature that he should be either to-day. He resumed his questioning, not without sharpness.

'One word, please. Tell me something of what has happened since Thursday, before I see her. I have written—but till this morning I have had not one line from her.'

They were standing by the window, he with his frowning gaze, in which agitation struggled against all his normal habits of manner and expression, fixed upon the lawn and the avenue. She told him briefly what she knew of Marcella's doings since the arrival of Wharton's telegram—of the night in the cottage, and the child's death. It was plain that he listened with a shuddering repulsion.

'Do you know,' he exclaimed, turning upon her, 'that she may never recover this? Such a strain, such a horror! rushed upon so wantonly, so needlessly.'

'I understand. You think that I have been to blame? I do not wonder. But it is not true—not in this particular case. And any way your view is not mine. Life—and the iron of it—has to be faced, even by women—perhaps, most of all, by women. But let me go now. Otherwise my husband will come in. And I imagine you would rather see Marcella before you see him or anyone.'

That suggestion told. He instantly gathered him-

self together, and nervously begged that she would send Marcella to him at once. He could think of nothing, talk of nothing, till he had seen her. She went, and Aldous was left to walk up and down the room planning what he should say. After the ghastly intermingling of public interests and private misery in which he had lived for these many weeks there was a certain relief in having reached the cleared space—the decisive moment—when he might at last give himself wholly to what truly concerned him. He would not lose her without a struggle. None the less he knew, and had known ever since the scene in the Court library, that the great disaster of his life was upon him.

The handle of the door turned. She was there.

He did not go to meet her. She had come in wrought up to face attack—reproaches, entreaties—ready to be angry or to be humble, as he should give her the lead. But he gave her no lead. She had to break through that quivering silence as best she could.

'I wanted to explain everything to you,' she said, in a low voice, as she came near to him. 'I know my note last night was very hard and abrupt. I didn't mean to be hard. But I am still so tired—and everything that one says, and feels, hurts so.'

She sank down upon a chair. This womanish appeal to his pity had not been at all in her programme. Nor did it immediately succeed. As he looked at her, he could only feel the wantonness of this eclipse into which she had plunged her youth and beauty. There

was wrath, a passionate protesting wrath, under his pain.

'Marcella,' he said, sitting down beside her, 'did you read my letter that I wrote you the day before——?'

'Yes.'

'And after that, you could still believe that I was indifferent to your grief—your suffering—or to the suffering of any human being for whom you cared? You could still think it, and feel it?'

'It was not what you have said all through,' she replied, looking sombrely away from him, her chin on her hand; 'it is what you have done.'

'What have I done?' he said proudly, bending forward from his seat beside her. 'What have I ever done but claim from you that freedom you desire so passionately for others—freedom of conscience—freedom of judgment? You denied me this freedom, though I asked it of you with all my soul. And you denied me more. Through these five weeks you have refused me the commonest right of love—the right to show you myself, to prove to you that through all this misery of differing opinion—misery, much more, oh, much more to me than to you!—I was in truth bent on the same ends with you, bearing the same burden, groping towards the same goal.'

'No! no!' she cried, turning upon him, and catching at a word; 'what burden have you ever borne? I know you were sorry—that there was a struggle in your mind—that you pitied me—pitied *them*. But you

judged it all *from above*—you looked down—and I could not see that you had any right. It made me mad to have such things seen from a height, when I was below—in the midst—*close* to the horror and anguish of them.'

'Whose fault was it,' he interrupted, 'that I was not with you? Did I not offer—entreat? I could not sign a statement of fact which seemed to me an untrue statement, but what prevented me—prevented us.—However, let me take that point first. Would you,'—he spoke deliberately, 'would you have had me put my name to a public statement which I, rightly or wrongly, believed to be false, because you asked me? You owe it to me to answer.'

She could not escape the penetrating fire of his eye. The man's mildness, his quiet, self-renouncing reserve, were all burnt up at last in this white heat of an accusing passion. In return she began to forget her own resolve to bear herself gently.

'You don't remember,' she cried, 'that what divided us was your—your—incapacity to put the human pity first; to think of the surrounding circumstances—of the debt that you and I and everybody like us owe to a man like Hurd—to one who had been stunted and starved by life as he had been.'

Her lip began to tremble.

'Then it comes to this,' he said steadily, 'that if I had been a poor man, you would have allowed me my conscience—my judgment of right and wrong—in such

a matter. You would have let me remember that I was a citizen, and that pity is only one side of justice! You would have let me plead that Hurd's sin was not against me, but against the community, and that in determining whether to do what you wished or no, I must think of the community and its good before even I thought of pleasing you. If I had possessed no more than Hurd, all this would have been permitted me; but because of Maxwell Court—because of my *money*,'—she shrank before the accent of the word—'you refused me the commonest moral rights. *My* scruple, *my* feeling, were nothing to you. Your pride was engaged as well as your pity, and I must give way. Marcella! you talk of justice—you talk of equality—is the only man who can get neither at your hands—the man whom you promised to marry!'

His voice dwelt on that last word, dwelt and broke. He leant over her in his roused strength, and tried to take her hand. But she moved away from him with a cry.

'It is no use! Oh, don't—don't! It may be all true. I was vain, I dare say, and unjust, and hard. But don't you see—don't you understand—if we *could* take such different views of such a case—if it could divide us so deeply—what chance would there be if we were married? I ought never—never—to have said "Yes" to you—even as I was then. But *now*,' she turned to him slowly, 'can't you see it for yourself? I am a changed creature. Certain things in me are gone—*gone*—and

instead there is a fire—something driving, tormenting—which must burn its way out. When I think of what I liked so much when you asked me to marry you—being rich, and having beautiful things, and dresses, and jewels, and servants, and power—social power—above all *that*—I feel sick and choked. I couldn't breathe now in a house like Maxwell Court. The poor have come to mean to me the only people who really *live*, and really *suffer*. I must live with them, work for them, find out what I can do for them. You must give me up—you must indeed. Oh! and you will! You will be glad enough, thankful enough, when—when—*you know what I am!*'

He started at the words. Where was the prophetess? He saw that she was lying white and breathless, her face hidden against the arm of the chair.

In an instant he was on his knees beside her.

'Marcella!' he could hardly command his voice, but he held her struggling hand against his lips. 'You think that suffering belongs to one class? Have you really no conception of what you will be dealing to me if you tear yourself away from me?'

She withdrew her hand, sobbing.

'Don't, don't stay near me!' she said; 'there is—more—there is something else.'

Aldous rose.

'You mean,' he said in an altered voice, after a pause of silence, 'that another influence—another man—has come between us?'

She sat up, and with a strong effort drove back her weeping.

'If I could say to you only this,' she began at last, with long pauses, '"I mistook myself and my part in life. I did wrong, but forgive me, and let me go for both our sakes"—that would be—well!—that would be difficult,—but easier than this! Haven't you understood at all? When—when Mr. Wharton came, I began to see things very soon, not in my own way, but in his way. I had never met anyone like him—not anyone who showed me such possibilities in *myself*—such new ways of using one's life, and not only one's possessions—of looking at all the great questions. I thought it was just friendship, but it made me critical, impatient of everything else. I was never myself from the beginning. Then,—after the ball,'—he stooped over her that he might hear her the more plainly—'when I came home I was in my room and I heard steps—there are ghost stories, you know, about that part of the house—I went out to see. Perhaps, in my heart of hearts—oh, I can't tell, I can't tell!—any way, he was there. We went into the library, and we talked. He did not want to touch our marriage,—but he said all sorts of mad things,—and at last—he kissed me.'

The last words were only breathed. She had often pictured herself confessing these things to him. But the humiliation in which she actually found herself before him was more than she had ever dreamed of, more than she could bear. All those great words of

pity and mercy—all that implication of a moral atmosphere to which he could never attain—to end in this story! The effect of it, on herself, rather than on him, was what she had not foreseen.

Aldous raised himself slowly.

'And when did this happen?' he asked, after a moment.

'I told you—the night of the ball—of the murder,' she said with a shiver; 'we saw Hurd cross the avenue. I meant to have told you everything at once.'

'And you gave up that intention?' he asked her, when he had waited a little for more, and nothing came.

She turned upon him with a flash of the old defiance.

'How could I think of my own affairs?'

'Or of mine?' he said bitterly.

She made no answer.

Aldous got up and walked to the chimney-piece. He was very pale, but his eyes were bright and sparkling. When she looked up at him at last she saw that her task was done. His scorn—his resentment—were they not the expiation, the penalty she had looked forward to all along?—and with that determination to bear them calmly? Yet, now that they were there in front of her, they stung.

'So that—for all those weeks—while you were letting me write as I did, while you were letting me conceive you and your action as I did, you had this on your mind?

You never gave me a hint; you let me plead; you let me regard you as wrapped up in the unselfish end; you sent me those letters of his—those most misleading letters!—and all the time——'

'But I meant to tell you—I always meant to tell you,' she cried passionately. 'I would never have gone on with a secret like that—not for your sake—but for my own.'

'Yet you did go on—so long,' he said steadily; 'and my agony of mind during those weeks—my feeling towards you—my——'

He broke off, wrestling with himself. As for her, she had fallen back in her chair, physically incapable of anything more.

He walked over to her side and took up his hat.

'You have done me wrong,' he said, gazing down upon her. 'I pray God you may not do yourself a greater wrong in the future! Give me leave to write to you once more, or to send my friend Edward Hallin to see you. Then I will not trouble you again.'

He waited, but she could give him no answer. Her form as she lay there in this physical and moral abasement printed itself upon his heart. Yet he felt no desire whatever to snatch the last touch—the last kiss—that wounded passion so often craves. Inwardly, and without words, he said farewell to her. She heard his steps across the room; the door shut; she was alone—and free.

BOOK III

'O Neigung, sage, wie hast du so tief
Im Herzen dich verstecket?
Wer hat dich, die verborgen schlief,
Gewecket?'

CHAPTER I

'Don't suppose that I feel enthusiastic or sentimental about the "claims of Labour,"' said Wharton, smiling to the lady beside him. 'You may get that from other people, but not from me. I am not moral enough to be a fanatic. My position is simplicity itself. When things are inevitable, I prefer to be on the right side of them, and not on the wrong. There is not much more in it than that. I would rather be on the back of the "bore," for instance, as it sweeps up the tidal river, than the swimmer caught underneath it.'

'Well, that is intelligible,' said Lady Selina Farrell, looking at her neighbour, as she crumbled her dinner-roll. To crumble your bread at dinner is a sign of nervousness, according to Sydney Smith, who did it with both hands when he sat next an Archbishop; yet no one for a good many years past had ever suspected Lady Selina of nervousness, though her powers had probably been tried before now by the neighbourhood of many Primates, Catholic and Anglican. For Lady Selina went much into society, and had begun it young.

'Still, you know,' she resumed after a moment's

pause—'you *play* enthusiasm in public—I suppose you must.'

'Oh! of course,' said Wharton indifferently. 'That is in the game.'

'Why should it be—always? If you are a leader of the people, why don't you educate them? My father says that bringing feeling into politics is like making rhymes in one's account book.'

'Well, when you have taught the masses how *not* to feel,' said Wharton laughing, 'we will follow your advice. Meanwhile it is our brains and their feelings that do the trick. And, by the way, Lady Selina, are *you* always so cool? If you saw the Revolution coming to-morrow into the garden of Alresford House, would you go to the balcony and argue?'

'I devoutly hope there would be somebody ready to do something more to the point,' said Lady Selina hastily. 'But of course *we* have enthusiasms too.'

'What, the Flag—and the Throne—that kind of thing?'

The ironical attention which Wharton began at this moment to devote to the selection of an olive annoyed his companion.

'Yes,' she repeated emphatically, 'the Flag and the Throne—all that has made England great in the past. But we know very well that they are not *your* enthusiasms.'

Wharton's upper lip twitched a little.

'And you are quite sure that Busbridge Towers has

nothing to do with it?' he said suddenly, looking round upon her.

Busbridge Towers was the fine ancestral seat which belonged to Lady Selina's father, that very respectable and ancient peer, Lord Alresford, whom an ungrateful party had unaccountably omitted—for the first time—from the latest Conservative administration.

'Of course we perfectly understand,' replied Lady Selina scornfully, 'that your side—and especially your Socialist friends, put down all that *we* do and say to greed and selfishness. It is our misfortune—hardly our fault.'

'Not at all,' said Wharton quietly, 'I was only trying to convince you that it is a little difficult to drive feeling out of politics. Do you suppose our host succeeds? You perceive?—this is a Radical house—and a Radical banquet?'

He pushed the *menu* towards her significantly. Then his eye travelled with its usual keen rapidity over the room, over the splendid dinner-table, with its display of flowers and plate, and over the assembled guests. He and Lady Selina were dining at the hospitable board of a certain rich manufacturer, who drew enormous revenues from the west, had formed part of the Radical contingent of the last Liberal ministry, and had especially distinguished himself by a series of uncompromising attacks on the ground landlords of London.

Lady Selina sighed.

'It is all a horrible tangle,' she said, 'and what the

next twenty years will bring forth who can tell? Oh! one moment, Mr. Wharton, before I forget. Are you engaged for Saturday week?'

He drew a little note-book out of his pocket and consulted it. It appeared that he was not engaged.

'Then will you dine with us?' She lightly mentioned the names of four or five distinguished guests, including the Conservative Premier of the day. Wharton made her a little ceremonious bow.

'I shall be delighted. Can you trust me to behave?'

Lady Selina's smile made her his match for the moment.

'Oh! we can defend ourselves!' she said. 'By the way, I think you told me that Mr. Raeburn was not a friend of yours.'

'No,' said Wharton, facing her look with coolness. 'If you have asked Mr. Raeburn for the 23rd, let me crave your leave to cancel that note in my pocket-book. Not for my sake, you understand, at all.'

She had difficulty in concealing her curiosity. But his face betrayed nothing. It always seemed to her that his very dark and straight eyebrows, so obtrusive and unusual as compared with the delicacy of the features, of the fair skin and light brown curls, made it easy for him to wear any mask he pleased. By their mere physical emphasis they drew attention away from the subtler and more revealing things of expression.

'They say' she went on 'that he is sure to do well

in the House, if only he can be made to take interest enough in the party. But one of his admirers told me that he was not at all anxious to accept this post they have just given him. He only did it to please his grandfather. My father thinks Lord Maxwell much aged this year. He is laid up, now, with a chill of some sort, I believe. Mr. Raeburn will have to make haste if he is to have any career in the Commons. But you can see he cares very little about it. All his friends tell me they find him changed since that unlucky affair last year. By the way, did you ever see that girl?'

'Certainly. I was staying in her father's house while the engagement was going on.'

'Were you?' said Lady Selina eagerly. 'And what did you think of her?'

'Well, in the first place,' said Wharton slowly, 'she is beautiful—you knew that?'

Lady Selina nodded.

'Yes. Miss Raeburn, who has told me most of what I know, always throws in a shrug and a "but" when you ask about her looks. However, I have seen a photograph of her, so I can judge for myself. It seemed to me a beauty that men perhaps would admire more than women.'

Wharton devoted himself to his green peas, and made no reply. Lady Selina glanced at him sharply. She herself was by no means a beauty. But neither was she plain. She had a long, rather distinguished face,

with a marked nose and a wide thin-lipped mouth. Her plentiful fair hair, a little dull and ashy in colour, was heaped up above her forehead in infinitesimal curls and rolls which did great credit to her maid, and gave additional height to the head and length to a thin white neck. Her light blue eyes were very direct and observant. Their expression implied both considerable knowledge of the world, and a natural inquisitiveness. Many persons indeed were of opinion that Lady Selina wished to know too much about you and were on their guard when she approached.

'You admired her very much, I see,' she resumed, as Wharton still remained silent.

'Oh, yes. We talked Socialism, and then I defended her poacher for her.'

'Oh, I remember. And it is really true, as Miss Raeburn says, that she broke it off because she could not get Lord Maxwell and Mr. Raeburn to sign the petition for the poacher?'

'Somewhere about true,' said Wharton carelessly.

'Miss Raeburn always gives the same account; you can never get anything else out of her. But I sometimes wonder whether it is the *whole* truth. *You* think she was sincere?'

'Well, she gave up Maxwell Court and thirty thousand a year,' he replied drily. 'I should say she had at least earned the benefit of the doubt.'

'I mean,' said Lady Selina, 'was she in love with anybody else, and was the poacher an excuse?'

She turned upon him as she spoke—a smiling, self-possessed person — a little spoilt by those hard, inquisitive eyes.

'No, I think not,' said Wharton, throwing his head back to meet her scrutiny. 'If so, nothing has been heard of him yet. Miss Boyce has been at St. Edward's Hospital for the last year.'

'To learn nursing? It is what all the women do nowadays, they tell me, who can't get on with their relations or their lovers. Do you suppose it is such a very hard life?'

'I don't want to try!' said Wharton. 'Do you?'

She evaded his smile.

'What is she going to do when she has done her training?'

'Settle down and nurse among the poor, I believe.'

'Magnificent, no doubt, but hardly business, from her point of view. How much more she might have done for the poor with thirty thousand a year! And any woman could put up with Aldous Raeburn.'

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

'We come back to those feelings, Lady Selina, you think so badly of.'

She laughed.

'Well, but feelings must be intelligible. And this seems so small a cause. However, were you there when it was broken off?'

'No; I have never seen her since the day of the poacher's trial.'

'Oh! So she has gone into complete seclusion from all her friends?'

'That I can't answer for. I can only tell you my own experience.'

Lady Selina bethought herself of a great many more questions to ask, but somehow did not ask them. The talk fell upon politics, which lasted till the hostess gave the signal, and Lady Selina, gathering up her fan and gloves, swept from the room next after the Countess at the head of the table, while a host of elderly ladies, wives of ministers and the like, stood meekly by to let her pass.

As he sat down again, Wharton made the entry of the dinner at Alresford House, to which he had just promised himself, a little plainer. It was the second time in three weeks that Lady Selina had asked him, and he was well aware that several other men at this dinner-table, of about the same standing and prospects as himself, would be very glad to be in his place. Lady Selina, though she was unmarried, and not particularly handsome or particularly charming, was a personage—and knew it. As the mistress of her father's various fine houses, and the kinswoman of half the great families of England, she had ample social opportunities, and made, on the whole, clever use of them. She was not exactly popular, but in her day she had been extremely useful to many, and her invitations were prized. Wharton had been introduced to her at the beginning of this, his second session,

had adopted with her the easy, aggressive, 'personal' manner—which, on the whole, was his natural manner towards women—and had found it immediately successful.

When he had replaced his pocket-book he found himself approached by a man on his own side of the table, a member of Parliament like himself, with whom he was on moderately friendly terms.

'Your motion comes on next Friday, I think,' said the new comer.

Wharton nodded.

'It'll be a beastly queer division,' said the other—'a precious lot of cross-voting.'

'That'll be the way with that kind of question for a good while to come—don't you think'—said Wharton smiling, 'till we get a complete reorganisation of parties?'

As he leaned back in his chair, enjoying his cigarette, his half-shut eyes behind the curls of smoke made a good-humoured but contemptuous study of his companion.

Mr. Bateson was a young manufacturer, recently returned to Parliament, and newly married. He had an open ruddy face, spoilt by an expression of chronic perplexity which was almost fretfulness. Not that the countenance was without shrewdness; but it suggested that the man had ambitions far beyond his powers of performance, and already knew himself to be inadequate.

'Well, I shouldn't wonder if you get a considerable vote,' he resumed, after a pause; 'it's like women's suffrage. People will go on voting for this kind of thing, till there seems a chance of getting it. *Then!*'

'Ah, well!' said Wharton easily, 'I see we shan't get *you*.'

'I!—vote for an eight-hours day, by local and trade option! In my opinion I might as well vote for striking the flag on the British Empire at once! It would be the death-knell of all our prosperity.'

Wharton's artistic ear disliked the mixture of metaphor, and he frowned slightly.

Mr. Bateson hurried on. He was already excited, and had fallen upon Wharton as a prey.

'And you really desire to make it *penal* for us manufacturers—for me in my industry—in spite of all the chances and changes of the market, to work my men more than eight hours a day—*even* if they wish it!'

'We must get our decision, our majority of the adult workers in any given district in favour of an eight-hours day,' said Wharton blandly; 'then when they have voted for it, the local authority will put the Act in motion.'

'And my men—conceivably—may have voted in the minority, against any such tomfoolery; yet, when the vote is given, it will be a punishable offence for them, and me, to work overtime? You *actually* mean that; how do you propose to punish us?'

'Well,' said Wharton, relighting his cigarette, 'that is a much debated point. Personally, I am in favour of imprisonment rather than fine.'

The other bounded on his chair.

'You would imprison me for working overtime—with *willing men!*'

Wharton eyed him with smiling composure. Two or three other men—an old general, the smart private secretary of a cabinet minister, and a well-known permanent official at the head of one of the great spending departments—who were sitting grouped at the end of the table a few feet away, stopped their conversation to listen.

'Except in cases of emergency, which are provided for under the Act,' said Wharton. 'Yes, I should imprison you, with the greatest pleasure in life. Eight hours *plus* overtime is what we are going to stop, *at all hazards!*'

A flash broke from his blue eyes. Then he tranquilly resumed his smoking.

The young manufacturer flushed with angry agitation.

'But you must know—it is inconceivable that you should not know—that the whole thing is stark staring lunacy. In our business trade is declining, the export falling every year, the imports from France steadily advancing. And you are going to make us fight a country where men work eleven hours a day for lower wages, with our hands tied behind our backs by legis-

lation of this kind? Well, you know'—he threw himself back in his chair with a contemptuous laugh—'there can be only one explanation. You and your friends, of course, have banished political economy to Saturn—and you suppose that by doing so you get rid of it for all the rest of the world. But I imagine it will beat you, all the same!'

He stopped in a heat. As usual, what he found to say was not equal to what he wanted to say, and beneath his anger with Wharton was the familiar fuming at his own lack of impressiveness.

'Well, I dare say,' said Wharton serenely. 'However, let's take your "political economy" a moment, and see if I can understand what you mean by it. There never were two words that meant all things to all men so disreputably!'

And thereupon to the constant accompaniment of his cigarette, and with the utmost composure and good temper, he began to 'heckle' his companion, putting questions, suggesting perfidious illustrations, extracting innocent admissions, with a practised shrewdness and malice which presently left the unfortunate Bateson floundering in a sea of his own contradictions, and totally unable for the moment to attach any rational idea whatever to those great words of his favourite science, wherewith he was generally accustomed to make such triumphant play, both on the platform and in the bosom of the family.

The permanent official round the corner watched

the unequal fight with attentive amusement. Once when it was a question of Mill's doctrine of cost of production as compared with that of a leading modern collectivist, he leant forward and supplied a correction of something Wharton had said. Wharton instantly put down his cigarette and addressed him in another tone. A rapid dialogue passed between them, the dialogue of experts, sharp, allusive, elliptical, in the midst of which the host gave the signal for joining the ladies.

'Well, all I know is,' said Bateson, as he got up, 'that these kind of questions, if you and your friends have your way, will *wreck* the Liberal party before long —far more effectually than anything Irish has ever done. On these things some of us will fight, if it must come to that.'

Wharton laughed.

'It would be a national misfortune if you didn't give us a stiff job,' he said, with an airy good-humour which at once made the other's blustering look ridiculous.

'I wonder what that fellow is going to do in the House,' said the permanent official to his companion as they went slowly upstairs, Wharton being some distance ahead. 'People are all beginning to talk of him as a coming man, though nobody quite knows why, as yet. They tell me he frames well in speaking, and will probably make a mark with his speech next Friday. But his future seems to me very doubtful. He can only become a power as the head of a new

Labour party. But where is the party? They all want to be kings. The best point in his favour is that they are likely enough to take a gentleman if they must have a leader. But there still remains the question whether he can make anything out of the material.'

'I hope to God he can't!' said the old general grimly; 'it is these town-chatterers of yours that will bring the Empire about our heads before we've done. They've begun it already, wherever they saw a chance.'

In the drawing-room Wharton devoted himself for a few minutes to his hostess, a little pushing woman, who confided to his apparently attentive ear a series of grievances as to the bad manners of the great ladies of their common party, and the general evil plight of Liberalism in London from the social point of view.

'Either they give themselves airs—*rediculous* airs!—or they admit everybody!' she said, with a lavish use of white shoulders and scarlet fan by way of emphasis. 'My husband feels it just as much as I do. It is a real misfortune for the party that its social affairs should be so villainously managed. Oh! I dare say *you* don't mind, Mr. Wharton, because you are a Socialist. But, I assure you, those of us who still believe in the influence of the best people don't like it.'

A point whence Wharton easily led her through a series of spiteful anecdotes bearing on her own social

mishaps and rebuffs, which were none the less illuminating because of the teller's anxious effort to give them a dignified and disinterested air. Then, when neither she nor her plight were any longer amusing, he took his leave, exchanging another skirmishing word or two on the staircase with Lady Selina, who, it appeared, was 'going on' as he was, and to the same house.

In a few minutes his hansom landed him at the door of a great mansion in Berkeley Square, where a huge evening party was proceeding, given by one of those Liberal ladies whom his late hostess had been so freely denouncing. The lady and the house belonged to a man who had held high office in the late Administration.

As he made his way slowly to the top of the crowded stairs, the stately woman in white satin and diamonds who was 'receiving' on the landing marked him, and when his name was announced she came forward a step or two. Nothing could have been more flattering than the smile with which she gave him her gloved hand to touch.

'Have you been out of town all these Sundays?' she said to him, with the slightest air of soft reproach. 'I am always at home, you know—I told you so!'

She spoke with the ease of one who could afford to make whatever social advances she pleased. Wharton excused himself, and they chatted a little in the intervals of her perpetual greetings to the mounting

crowd. She and he had met at a famous country house in the Easter recess, and her aristocrat's instinct for all that gives savour and sharpness to the dish of life had marked him at once.

'Sir Hugh wants you to come down and see us in Sussex,' she said, stretching her white neck a little to speak after him, as he was at last carried through the drawing-room door by the pressure behind him. 'Will you?'

He threw back an answer which she rather took for granted than heard, for she nodded and smiled through it—stiffening her delicate face the moment afterwards to meet the timid remarks of one of her husband's constituents—asked by Sir Hugh in the streets that afternoon—who happened to present her with the next hand to shake.

Inside, Wharton soon found himself brought up against the ex-Secretary of State himself, who greeted him cordially, and then bantered him a little on his coming motion.

'Oh, I shall be interested to see what you make of it. But, you know, it has no *actuality*—never can have—till you can agree among yourselves. You *say* you want the same thing—I dare say you'll all swear it on Friday—but *really*——'

The statesman shook his head pleasantly.

'The details are a little vague still, I grant you,' said Wharton, smiling.

'And you think the principle matters twopence

without the details? I have always found that the difficulty with the Christian command, "Be ye perfect." The principle doesn't trouble me at all!'

The swaying of the entering throng parted the two speakers, and for a second or two the portly host followed with his eye the fair profile and lightly-built figure of the younger man as they receded from him in the crowd. It was in his mind that the next twenty years, whether this man or that turned out to be important or no, must see an enormous quickening of the political pace. He himself was not conscious of any jealousy of the younger men; but neither did he see among them any commanding personality. This young fellow, with his vivacity, his energy, and his Socialist whims, was interesting enough; and his problem was interesting—the problem of whether he could make a party out of the heterogeneous group of which he was turning out to be indisputably the ablest member. But what was there *certain* or *inevitable* about his future after all? And it was the same with all the rest. Whereas the leaders of the past had surely announced themselves beyond mistake from the beginning. He was inclined to think, however, that we were levelling up rather than levelling down. The world grew too clever, and leadership was more difficult every day.

Meanwhile Wharton found his progress through these stately rooms extremely pleasant. He was astonished at the multitude of people he knew, at the numbers of

faces that smiled upon him. Presently, after half an hour of hard small talk, he found himself for a moment without an acquaintance, leaning against an archway between two rooms, and free to watch the throng. Self-love, 'that froward presence, like a chattering child within us,' was all alert and happy. A feeling of surprise, too, which had not yet worn away. A year before he had told Marcella Boyce, and with conviction, that he was an outcast from his class. He smiled now at that past *naïveté* which had allowed him to take the flouts of his country neighbours and his mother's unpopularity with her aristocratic relations for an index of the way in which 'society' in general would be likely to treat him and his opinions. He now knew, on the contrary, that those opinions had been his best advertisement. Few people, it appeared, were more in demand among the great than those who gave it out that they would, if they could, abolish the great.

'It's because they're not enough afraid of us—yet,' he said to himself, not without spleen. 'When we really get to business—if we ever do—I shall not be coming to Lady Cradock's parties.'

'Mr. Wharton, do you ever do such a frivolous thing as go to the theatre?' said a pretty, languishing creature at his elbow, the wife of a London theatrical manager. 'Suppose you come and see us in "The Minister's Wooing," first night next Saturday. I've got *one* seat in my box, for somebody *very* agreeable. Only it must be somebody who can appreciate my frocks!'

'I should be charmed,' said Wharton. 'Are the frocks so adorable?'

'Adorable! Then I may write you a note? You don't have your horrid Parliament that night, do you?' and she fluttered on.

'I think you don't know my younger daughter, Mr. Wharton?' said a severe voice at his elbow.

He turned and saw an elderly matron with the usual matronly cap and careworn countenance putting forward a young thing in white, to whom he bowed with great ceremony. The lady was the wife of a north-country magnate of very old family, and one of the most exclusive of her kind in London. The daughter, a vision of young shyness and bloom, looked at him with frightened eyes as he leant against the wall beside her and began to talk. She wished he would go away and let her get to the girl friend who was waiting for her and signalling to her across the room. But in a minute or two she had forgotten to wish anything of the kind. The mixture of audacity with a perfect self-command in the manner of her new acquaintance, that searching, half-mocking look, which saw everything in detail, and was always pressing beyond the generalisations of talk and manners, the lightness and brightness of the whole aspect, of the curls. the eyes, the flexible determined mouth, these things arrested her. She began to open her virgin heart, first in protesting against attack, then in confession, till in ten minutes her white breast was heaving under the excitement of her own temerity,

and Wharton knew practically all about her, her mingled pleasure and remorse in 'going out,' her astonishment at the difference between the world as it was this year, and the world as it had been last, when she was still in the schoolroom—her Sunday-school—her brothers—her ideals—for she was a little nun at heart—her favourite clergyman—and all the rest of it.

'I say, Wharton, come and dine, will you, Thursday, at the House—small party—meet in my room?'

So said one of the party whips, from behind into his ear. The speaker was a popular young aristocrat, who in the preceding year had treated the member for West Brookshire with chilliness. Wharton turned—to consider a moment—then gave a smiling assent.

'All right!' said the other, withdrawing his hand from Wharton's shoulder—'good-night!' Two more of these beastly crushes to fight through till I can get to my bed, worse luck! Are any of your fellows here to-night?'

Wharton shook his head.

'Too austere, I suppose?'

'A question of dress coats, I should think,' said Wharton drily.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

'And this calls itself a party gathering—in a Radical and democratic house—what a farce it all is!'

'Agreed! good-night.'

And Wharton moved on, just catching as he did so the eyes of his new girl-acquaintance looking back at

him from a distant door. Their shy owner withdrew them instantly, coloured, and passed out of sight.

At the same moment a guest entered by the same door, a tall grave man in the prime of life, but already grey haired. Wharton, to his surprise, recognised Aldous Raeburn and saw also that the master of the house had him by the arm. They came towards him, talking. The crowd prevented him from getting effectually out of their way, but he turned aside and took up a magazine lying on a bookcase near.

'And you really think him a trifle better?' said the ex-minister.

'Oh yes, better—certainly better—but I am afraid he will hardly get back to work this session—the doctors talk of sending him away at once.'

'Ah well,' said the other, smiling, 'we don't intend, it seems, to let you send anything important up to the Lords yet awhile, so there will be time for him to recruit.'

'I wish I was confident about the recruiting,' said Raeburn sadly. 'He has lost much strength. I shall go with them to the Italian lakes at the end of next week, see them settled, and come back at once.'

'Shall you miss a sitting of the Commission?' asked his host. Both he and Raeburn were members of an important Labour Commission appointed the year before by the new Conservative Government.

'Hardly, I think,' said Raeburn. 'I am particularly anxious not to miss D——'s evidence.'

And they fell talking a little about the Commission and the witnesses recently examined before it. Wharton, who was wedged in by a group of ladies, and could not for the moment move, heard most of what they were saying, much against his will. Moreover Raeburn's tone of quiet and masterly familiarity with what he and his companion were discussing annoyed him. There was nothing in the world that he himself would more eagerly have accepted than a seat on that Commission.

'Ah! there is Lady Cradock!' said Raeburn, perceiving his hostess across a sea of intervening faces, and responding to her little wave of the hand. 'I must go and get a few words with her and then take my aunt away.'

As he made his way towards her, he suddenly brushed against Wharton, who could not escape. Raeburn looked up, recognised the man he had touched, flushed slightly and passed on. A bystander would have supposed them strangers to each other.

CHAPTER II

Two or three minutes later, Wharton was walking down a side street towards Piccadilly. After all the flattering incidents of the evening, the chance meeting with which it concluded had jarred unpleasantly. Confound the fellow! Was he the first man in the world who had been thrown over by a girl because he had been discovered to be a tiresome pedant? For even supposing Miss Boyce had described that little scene in the library at Mellor to her *fiancé* at the moment of giving him his dismissal—and the year before, by the help of all the news that reached him about the broken engagement, by the help still more of the look, or rather the entire absence of look wherewith Raeburn had walked past his greeting and his outstretched hand in a corridor of the House, on the first occasion of their meeting after the news had become public property, Wharton was inclined to think she *had*—what then? No doubt the stern moralist might have something to say on the subject of taking advantage of a guest's position to tamper with another man's betrothed. If so, the stern moralist would only show his usual incapacity to grasp the actual facts of flesh and blood. What chance would he or

anyone else have had with Marcella Boyce, if she had happened to be in love with the man she had promised to marry? That little trifle had been left out in the arrangement. It might have worked through perfectly well without; as it happened it had broken down. *Realities* had broken it down. Small blame to them!

'I stood for *truth*!' he said to himself with a kind of rage—'that moment when I held her in the library, she *lived*.—Raeburn offered her a platform, a position; *I* made her think, and feel. I helped her to know herself. Our relation was not passion; it stood on the threshold—but it was real—a true relation so far as it went. That it went no farther was due again to circumstances—realities—of another kind. That *he* should scorn and resent my performance at Mellor is natural enough. If we were in France he would call me out and I should give him satisfaction with all the pleasure in life. But what am *I* about? Are his ways mine? I should have nothing left but to shoot myself to-morrow if they were!'

He walked on swiftly, angrily rating himself for those symptoms of a merely false and conventional conscience which were apt to be roused in him by contact with Aldous Raeburn.

'Has he not interfered with my freedom—stamped his pedantic foot on me—ever since we were boys together? I have owed him one for many years—now I have paid it. Let him take the chances of war!'

Then, driven on by an irritation not to be quieted,

he began against his will to think of those various occasions on which he and Aldous Raeburn had crossed each other in the past—of that incident in particular which Miss Raeburn had roughly recalled to Lady Winterbourne's reluctant memory.

Well, and what of it? It had occurred when Wharton was a lad of twenty-one, and during an interval of some months when Aldous Raeburn, who had left Cambridge some three years before, and was already the man of importance, had shown a decided disposition to take up the brilliant, unmanageable boy, whom the Levens, among other relations, had already washed their hands of.

'What did he do it for?' thought Wharton. 'Philanthropic motives of course. He is one of the men who must always be saving their souls, and the black sheep of the world come in handy for the purpose. I remember I was flattered then. It takes one some time to understand the workings of the Hebraistic conscience!'

Yes—as it galled him to recollect—he had shown great plasticity for a time. He was then in the middle of his Oxford years, and Raeburn's letters and Raeburn's influence had certainly pulled him through various scrapes that might have been disastrous. Then—a little later—he could see the shooting-lodge on the moors above Loch Etive, where he and Raeburn, Lord Maxwell, Miss Raeburn, and a small party had spent the August of his twenty-first birthday. Well—that

surly keeper, and his pretty wife who had been Miss Raeburn's maid—could anything be more inevitable? A hard and jealous husband, and one of the softest, most sensuous natures that ever idleness made love to. The thing was in the air!—in the summer, in the blood—as little to be resisted as the impulse to eat when you are hungry, or drink when you thirst. Besides, what particular harm had been done, what particular harm *could* have been done with such a Cerberus of a husband? As to the outcry which had followed one special incident, nothing could have been more uncalled for, more superfluous. Aldous had demanded contrition, had said strong things with the flashing eyes, the set mouth of a Cato. And the culprit had turned obstinate—would repent nothing—not for the asking. Everything was arguable, and Renan's doubt as to whether he or Théophile Gautier were in the right of it, would remain a doubt to all time—that was all Raeburn could get out of him. After which the Hebraist friend of course had turned his back on the offender, and there was an end of it.

That incident, however, had belonged to a stage in his past life, a stage marked by a certain prolonged tumult of the senses, on which he now looked back with great composure. That tumult had found vent in other adventures more emphatic a good deal than the adventure of the keeper's wife. He believed that one or two of them had been not unknown to Raeburn.

Well, that was done with! His mother's death—

that wanton stupidity on the part of fate—and the shock it had somehow caused him, had first drawn him out of the slough of a cheap and facile pleasure on which he now looked back with contempt. Afterwards, his two years of travel, and the joys at once virile and pure they had brought with them, joys of adventure, bodily endurance, discovery, together with the intellectual stimulus which comes of perpetual change, of new heavens, new seas, new societies, had loosened the yoke of the flesh and saved him from himself. The deliverance so begun had been completed at home, by the various chances and opportunities which had since opened to him a solid and tempting career in that Labour movement his mother had linked him with, without indeed ever understanding either its objects or its men. The attack on capital now developing on all sides, the planning of the vast campaign, and the handling of its industrial troops, these things had made the pursuit of women look insipid, coupled as they were with the thrill of increasing personal success. Passion would require to present itself in new forms, if it was now to take possession of him again.

As to his relation to Raeburn, he well remembered that when, after that long break in his life, he and Aldous had met casually again, in London or elsewhere, Aldous had shown a certain disposition to forget the old quarrel, and to behave with civility, though not with friendliness. As to Wharton he was quite willing, though at the same time he had gone down to contest

West Brookshire, and, above all, had found himself in the same house as Aldous Raeburn's betrothed, with an even livelier sense than usual of the excitement to be got out of mere living.

No doubt when Raeburn heard that story of the library—if he had heard it—he recognised in it the man and the character he had known of old, and had shrunk from the connection of both with Marcella Boyce in bitter and insurmountable disgust. A mere Hebraist's mistake!

'That girl's attraction for me was not an attraction of the senses—except so far that for every normal man and woman charm is charm, and ginger is hot in the mouth, and always will be! What I played for with her was *power*—power over a nature that piqued and yet by natural affinity belonged to me. I could not have retained that power, as it happened, by any bait of passion. Even without the Hurd affair, if I had gone on to approach her so, her whole moral nature would have risen against me and her own treachery. I knew that perfectly well, and took the line I did because for the moment the game was too exciting, too interesting, to give up. For the moment! then a few days,—a few weeks later—Good Lord! what stuff we mortals be!'

And he raised his shoulders, mocking, yet by no means disliking his own idiosyncrasies. It had been strange, indeed, that complete change of mental emphasis, that alteration of spiritual axis that had

befallen him within the first weeks of his parliamentary life, nay, even before the Hurd agitation was over. That agitation had brought him vigorously and profitably into public notice at a convenient moment. But what had originally sprung from the impulse to retain a hold over a woman, became in the end the instrument of a new and quite other situation. Wharton had no sooner entered the House of Commons than he felt himself strangely at home there. He had the instinct for debate: the instinct for management: together with a sensitive and contriving ambition. He found himself possessed for the moment of powers of nervous endurance that astonished him—a patience of boredom besides, a capacity for drudgery, and for making the best of dull men. The omens were all favourable, sometimes startlingly so. He was no longer hampered by the ill-will of a county or a family connection. Here, in this new world, every man counted strictly for what, in the parliamentary sense, he was worth. Wharton saw that, owing to his public appearances during the two preceding years, he was noticed, listened to, talked about in the House, from the first; and that his position in the newly-formed though still loosely-bound Labour party was one of indefinite promise. The anxieties and pitfalls of the position only made it the more absorbing.

The quick, elastic nature adjusted itself at once. To some kinds of success, nothing is so important as the ability to forget—to sweep the mind free of everything irrelevant and superfluous. Marcella Boyce, and

all connected with her passed clean out of Wharton's consciousness. Except that once or twice he said to himself with a passing smile that it was a good thing he had not got himself into a worse scrape at Mellor. Good heavens! in what plight would a man stand—a man with his career to make—who had given Marcella Boyce claims upon him! As well entangle oneself with the Tragic Muse at once as with that stormy, unmanageable soul!

So much for a year ago. To-night, however, the past had been thrust back upon him, both by Lady Selina's talk and by the meeting with Raeburn. To smart indeed once more under that old ascendency of Raeburn's, was to be provoked into thinking of Raeburn's old love.

Where was Miss Boyce? Surely her year of hospital training must be up by now?

He turned into St. James's Street, stopped at a door not far from the Palace end, let himself in, and groped his way to the second floor. A sleepy manservant turned out of his room, and finding that his master was not inclined to go to bed, brought lights and mineral water. Wharton was practically a teetotaller. He had taken a whim that way as a boy, and a few experiments in drunkenness which he had made at college had only confirmed what had been originally perhaps a piece of notoriety-hunting. He had, as a rule, flawless health, and the unaccustomed headaches and nausea which followed these occasional excesses

had disgusted and deterred him. He shook himself easily free of a habit which had never gained a hold upon him, and had ever since found his abstinence a source both of vanity and of distinction. Nothing annoyed him more than to hear it put down to any ethical motive. 'If I liked the beastly stuff, I should swim in it to-morrow,' he would say with an angry eye when certain acquaintance—not those he made at Labour Congresses—goaded him on the point. 'As it is, why should I make it, or chloral, or morphia, or any other poison, my master? What's the inducement—eh, you fellows?'

En revanche he smoked inordinately.

'Is that all, sir,' said his servant, pausing behind his chair, after candles, matches, cigarettes, and Apollinaris had been supplied in abundance.

'Yes; go to bed, Williams, but don't lock up. Good-night.'

The man departed, and Wharton, going to the window which opened on a balcony looking over St. James Street, threw it wide, and smoked a cigarette leaning against the wall. It was on the whole a fine night and warm, though the nip of the east wind was not yet out of the air. In the street below there was still a good deal of movement, for it was only just past midnight and the clubs were not yet empty. To his right the turreted gate-house of the Palace with its clock rose dark against a sky covered with light, windy cloud. Beyond it his eye sought instinctively for the Clock Tower, which stood to-night dull and

beaconless—like someone in a stupid silence. That light of the sitting House had become to him one of the standing pleasures of life. He had never yet been honestly glad of its extinction.

'I'm a precious raw hand,' he confessed to himself with a shake of the head as he stood there smoking. 'And it can't last—nothing does.'

Presently he laid down his cigarette a moment on the edge of the balcony, and, coming back into the room, opened a drawer, searched a little, and finally took out a letter. He stooped over the lamp to read it. It was the letter which Marcella Boyce had written him some two or three days after the breach of her engagement. That fact was barely mentioned at the beginning of it, without explanation or comment of any kind. Then the letter continued:—

'I have never yet thanked you as I ought for all that you have done and attempted through these many weeks. But for them it must have been plain to us both that we could never rightly meet again. I am very destitute just now—and I cling to self-respect as though it were the only thing left me. But that scene in the past, which put us both wrong with honour and conscience, has surely been wiped out—*thought*—*suffered* away. I feel that I dare now say to you, as I would to any other co-worker and co-thinker—if in the future you ever want my work, if you can set me, with others, to any task that wants doing and that I could do—ask me, and I am not likely to refuse.

'But for the present I am going quite away into another world. I have been more ill than I have ever been in my life this last few days, and they are all, even my father, ready to agree with me that I must go. As soon as I am a little stronger I am to have a year's training at a London hospital, and then I shall probably live for a while in town and nurse. This scheme occurred to me as I came back with the wife from seeing Hurd the day before the execution. I knew then that all was over for me at Mellor.

'As for the wretched break-down of everything—of all my schemes and friendships here—I had better not speak of it. I feel that I have given these village-folk, whom I had promised to help, one more reason to despair of life. It is not pleasant to carry such a thought away with one. But if the tool breaks and blunts, how can the task be done? It can be of no use till it has been re-set.

'I should like to know how your plans prosper. But I shall see your paper and follow what goes on in Parliament. For the present I want neither to write nor get letters. They tell me that as a probationer I shall spend my time at first in washing glasses, and polishing bath-taps, on which my mind rests!

'If you come across my friends of whom I have spoken to you—Louis, Anthony, and Edith Craven—and could make any use of Louis for the *Labour Clarion*, I should be grateful. I hear they have had bad times of late, and Louis has engaged himself, and wants to be

married. You remember I told you how we worked at the South Kensington classes together, and how they made me a Venturist?

'Yours very truly,

'MARCELLA BOYCE.'

Wharton laid down the letter, making a wry mouth over some of its phrases.

'"*Put us both wrong with honour and conscience.*" "*One more reason for despair of life*"—"*All was over for me at Mellor*"—dear! dear!—how women like the big words—the emphatic pose. All those little odds and ends of charities—that absurd straw-plaiting scheme! Well, perhaps one could hardly expect her to show a sense of humour just then. But why does nature so often leave it out in these splendid creatures?'

'Hullo!' he added, as he bent over the table to look for a pen; 'why didn't that idiot give me these?'

For there, under an evening paper which he had not touched, lay a pile of unopened letters. His servant had forgotten to point them out to him. On the top was a letter on which Wharton pounced at once. It was addressed in a bold inky hand, and he took it to be from Nehemiah Wilkins, M.P., his former colleague at the Birmingham Labour Congress, of late a member of the *Labour Clarion* staff, and as such a daily increasing plague and anxiety to the *Clarion's* proprietor.

However, the letter was not from Wilkins. It was from the secretary of a Midland trades-union, with whom Wharton had already been in communication.

The union was recent, and represented the as yet feeble organisation of a metal industry in process of transition from the home-workshop to the full factory, or Great Industry stage. The conditions of work were extremely bad, and grievances many; wages were low, and local distress very great. The secretary, a young man of ability and enthusiasm, wrote to Wharton to say that certain alterations in the local 'payment lists' lately made by the employers amounted to a reduction of wages; that the workers, beginning to feel the heartening effects of their union, were determined not to submit; that bitter and even desperate agitation was spreading fast, and that a far-reaching strike was imminent. Could they count on the support of the *Clarion*? The *Clarion* had already published certain letters on the industry from a Special Commissioner—letters which had drawn public attention, and had been eagerly read in the district itself. Would the *Clarion* now 'go in' for them? Would Mr. Wharton personally support them, in or out of Parliament, and get his friends to do the same? To which questions, couched in terms extremely flattering to the power of the *Clarion* and its owner, the secretary appended a long and technical statement of the situation.

Wharton looked up from the letter with a kindling eye. He foresaw an extremely effective case, both for the newspaper and the House of Commons. One of the chief capitalists involved was a man called Denny, who had been long in the House, for whom the owner

of the *Clarion* entertained a strong personal dislike. Denny had thwarted him vexatiously—had perhaps even made him ridiculous—on one or two occasions; and Wharton saw no reason whatever for forgiving one's enemies until, like Narvaez, one had 'shot them all.' There would be much satisfaction in making Denny understand who were his masters. And with these motives there mingled a perfectly genuine sympathy with the 'poor devils' in question, and a desire to see them righted.

'Somebody must be sent down at once,' he said to himself. 'I suppose,' he added, with discontent, 'it must be Wilkins.'

For the man who had written the articles for the *Labour Clarion*, as Special Commissioner, had some three weeks before left England to take command of a colonial newspaper.

Still pondering, he took up the other letters, turned them over—childishly pleased for the thousandth time by the M.P. on each envelope and the number and variety of his correspondence—and eagerly chose out three—one from his bankers, one from his Lincolnshire agent, and one from the *Clarion* office, undoubtedly this time in Wilkins' hand.

He read them, grew a little pale, swore under his breath, and, angrily flinging the letters away from him, he took up his cigarette again and thought.

The letter from his bankers asked his attention in stiff terms to a largely overdrawn account, and

entirely declined to advance a sum of money for which he had applied to them without the guarantee of two substantial names in addition to his own. The letter from his agent warned him that the extraordinary drought of the past six weeks, together with the general agricultural depression, would certainly mean a large remission of rents at the June quarter day, and also informed him that the holders of his co-operative farm would not be able to pay their half-yearly interest on the capital advanced to them by the landlord.

As to the third letter, it was in truth much more serious than the two others. Wilkins, the passionate and suspicious workman, of great natural ability, who had been in many ways a thorn in Wharton's side since the beginning of his public career, was now member for a mining constituency. His means of support were extremely scanty, and at the opening of the new Parliament Wharton had offered him well-paid work on the *Clarion* newspaper. It had seemed to the proprietor of the *Clarion* a way of attaching a dangerous man to himself, perhaps also of controlling him. Wilkins had grudgingly accepted, understanding perfectly well what was meant.

Since then the relation between the two men had been one of perpetual friction. Wilkins's irritable pride would yield nothing, either in the House or in the *Clarion* office, to Wharton's university education and class advantages, while Wharton watched with alarm the growing influence of this insubordinate and hostile

member of his own staff on those labour circles from which the *Clarion* drew its chief support.

In the letter he had just read Wilkins announced to the proprietor of the *Clarion*, that in consequence of the 'scandalous mismanagement' of that paper's handling of a certain trade arbitration which had just closed, he, Wilkins, could no longer continue to write for it, and begged to terminate his engagement at once, there being no formal agreement between himself and Wharton as to length of notice on either side. A lively attack on the present management and future prospects of the *Clarion* followed, together with the threat that the writer would do what in him lay henceforward to promote the cause of a certain rival organ lately started, among such working men as he might be able to influence.

'*Brute*! jealous, impracticable brute!' exclaimed Wharton aloud, as he stood chafing and smoking by the window. All the difficulties which this open breach was likely to sow in his path stood out before him in clear relief.

'*Personal* leadership, there is the whole problem,' he said to himself in moody despair. 'Can I—like Parnell—make a party and keep it together? Can I through the *Clarion*—and through influence *outside* the House—coerce the men *in* the House? If so, we can do something, and Lady Cradock will no longer throw me her smiles. If not the game is up; both for me and for them. They have no cohesion, no common informa-

tion, no real power. Without leaders they are a mere set of half-educated firebrands whom the trained mind of the country humours because it must, and so far as they have brute force behind them. Without *leadership*, *I* am a mere unit of the weakest group in the House. Yet, by Jove! it looks as though I had not the gifts.'

And he looked back with passionate chagrin on the whole course of his connection with Wilkins, his unavailing concessions and small humiliations, his belief in his own tact and success, all the time that the man dealt with was really slipping out of his hands.

'Damn the fellow!' he said at last, flinging his cigarette away. 'Well, that's done with. All the same, he would have liked that Midland job! He has been hankering after a strike there for some time, and might have ranted as he pleased. I shall have the satisfaction of informing him he has lost his opportunity. Now then—who to send? By Jove! what about Miss Boyce's friend?'

He stood a moment twisting the quill-pen he had taken up, then he hastily found a sheet of paper and wrote:—

'Dear Miss Boyce,—It is more than a year since I have heard of you, and I have been wondering with much interest lately whether you have really taken up a nursing life. You remember speaking to me of your friends the Cravens? I come across them sometimes at the Venturist meetings, and have always admired their ability. Last year I could do nothing practical

to meet your wishes. This year, however, there is an opening on the *Clarion*, and I should like to discuss it with you. Are you in town or to be found? I could come any afternoon next week, *early*—I go down to the House at four—or on Saturdays. But I should like it to be Tuesday or Wednesday, that I might try and persuade you to come to our Eight Hours debate on Friday night. It would interest you, and I think I could get you a seat. We Labour members are like the Irishmen—we can always get our friends in.

'I must send this round by Mellor, so it may not reach you till Tuesday. Perhaps you will kindly telegraph. The *Clarion* matter is pressing.

'Yours sincerely,

'H. S. Wharton.'

When he had finished he lingered a moment over the letter, the play of conflicting motives and memories bringing a vague smile to the lips.

Reverie, however, was soon dispersed. He recollected his other correspondents, and springing up he began to pace his room, gloomily thinking over his money difficulties, which were many. He and his mother had always been in want of money ever since he could remember. Lady Mildred would spend huge sums on her various crotchets and campaigns, and then subside for six months into wretched lodgings in a back street of Southsea or Worthing, while the Suffolk house was let, and her son mostly went abroad. This per-

petual worry of needy circumstances had always, indeed, sat lightly on Wharton. He was unmarried, and so far scarcity had generally passed into temporary comfort before he had time to find it intolerable. But now the whole situation was becoming more serious. In the first place, his subscriptions and obligations as a member of Parliament, and as one of the few propertied persons in a moneyless movement, were considerable. Whatever Socialism might make of money in the future, he was well aware that money in the present was no less useful to a Socialist politician than to anyone else. In the next place, the starting and pushing of the *Clarion* newspaper—originally purchased by the help of a small legacy from an uncle—had enormously increased the scale of his money transactions and the risks of life.

How was it that, with all his efforts, the *Clarion* was not making, but losing money? During the three years he had possessed it he had raised it from the position of a small and foul-mouthed print, indifferently nourished on a series of small scandals, to that of a Labour organ of some importance. He had written a weekly signed article for it, which had served from the beginning to bring both him and the paper into notice; he had taken pains with the organisation and improvement of the staff; above all, he had spent a great deal more money upon it, in the way of premises and appliances, than he had been, as it turned out, in any way justified in spending.

Hence, indeed, these tears. Rather more than a year before, while the *Clarion* was still enjoying a first spurt of success and notoriety, he had, with a certain recklessness which belonged to his character, invested in new and costly machinery, and had transferred the paper to larger offices. All this had been done on borrowed money.

Then, for some reason or other, the *Clarion* had ceased to answer to the spur—had, indeed, during the past eight months been flagging heavily. The outside world was beginning to regard the *Clarion* as an important paper. Wharton knew all the time that its advertisements were falling off, and its circulation declining. Why? Who can say? If it is true that books have their fates, it is still more true of newspapers. Was it that a collectivist paper—the rival organ mentioned by Wilkins—recently started by a group of young and outrageously clever Venturists and more closely in touch than the *Clarion* with two or three of the great unions, had filched the *Clarion's* ground? Or was it simply that, as Wharton put it to himself in moments of rage and despondency, the majority of working men 'are either sots or blockheads, and will read and support *nothing* but the low racing or police-court news, which is all their intelligences deserve'? Few people had at the bottom of their souls a more scornful distrust of the 'masses' than the man whose one ambition at the present moment was to be the accepted leader of English labour.

Finally, his private expenditure had always been luxurious; and he was liable, it will be seen, to a kind of debt that is not easily kept waiting. On the whole, his bankers had behaved to him with great indulgence.

He fretted and fumed, turning over plan after plan as he walked, his curly head sunk in his shoulders, his hands behind his back. Presently he stopped—absently—in front of the inner wall of the room, where, above a heavy rosewood bookcase, brought from his Lincolnshire house, a number of large framed photographs were hung close together.

His eye caught one and brightened. With an impatient gesture, like that of a reckless boy, he flung his thoughts away from him.

'If ever the game becomes too tiresome here, why, the next steamer will take me out of it! What a *gorgeous* time we had on that glacier!'

He stood looking at a splendid photograph of a glacier in the Thibetan Himalayas, where, in the year following his mother's death, he had spent four months with an exploring party. The plate had caught the very grain and glisten of the snow, the very sheen and tint of the ice. He could *feel* the azure of the sky, the breath of the mountain wind. The man seated on the ladder over that bottomless crevasse was himself. And there were the guides, two from Chamounix, one from Grindelwald, and that fine young fellow, the son of the elder Chamounix guide, whom they had lost by a stone-shower on that nameless

peak towering to the left of the glacier. Ah, those had been years of *life*, those *Wanderjahre*! He ran over the photographs with a kind of greed, his mind meanwhile losing itself in covetous memories of foamy seas, of long, low, tropical shores with their scattered palms, of superb rivers sweeping with sound and fury round innumerable islands, of great buildings ivory-white amid the wealth of creepers which had pulled them into ruin, vacant now for ever of the voice of man, and ringed by untrodden forests.

'"Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay,"' he thought. 'Ah! but how much did the man who wrote that know about Cathay?'

And with his hands thrust into his pockets, he stood lost awhile in a flying dream that defied civilisation and its cares. How well, how indispensable to remember, that beyond these sweltering streets where we choke and swarm, Cathay stands always waiting! *Somewhere*, while we toil in the gloom and the crowd, there is *air*, there is *sea*, the joy of the sun, the life of the body, so good, so satisfying! This interminable ethical or economical battle, these struggles selfish or altruistic, in which we shout ourselves hoarse to no purpose—why! they could be shaken off at a moment's notice!

'However'—he turned on his heel—'suppose we try a few other trifles first. What time? those fellows won't have gone to bed yet!'

He took out his watch, then extinguished his

candles, and made his way to the street. A hundred yards or so away from his own door he stopped before a well-known fashionable club, extremely small, and extremely select, where his mother's brother, the peer of the family, had introduced him when he was young and tender, and his mother's relations still cherished hopes of snatching him as a brand from the burning.

The front rooms of the club were tolerably full still. He passed on to the back. A door-keeper stationed in the passage stepped back and silently opened a door. It closed instantly behind him, and Wharton found himself in a room with some twenty other young fellows playing baccarat, piles of shining money on the tables, the electric lamps hung over each, lighting every detail of the scene with the same searching disenchanting glare.

'I say!' cried a young dark-haired fellow, like a dishevelled Lord Byron. 'Here comes the Labour leader—make room!'.

And amid laughter and chaffing, he was drawn down to the baccarat table where a new deal was just beginning. He felt in his pockets for money; his eyes, intent and shining, followed every motion of the dealer's hand. For three years now, ever since his return from his travels, the gambler's passion had been stealing on him. Already this season he had lost and won—on the whole lost—large sums. And the fact was—so far—absolutely unknown except to the men with whom he played in this room.

CHAPTER III

'If yer goin downstairs, Nuss, you'd better take that there scuttle with yer, for the coals is gittin low an it ull save yer a journey!'

Marcella looked with amusement at her adviser—a small bandy-legged boy in shirt and knickerbockers, with black Jewish eyes in a strongly featured face. He stood leaning on the broom he had just been wielding, his sleeves rolled up to the shoulder showing his tiny arms; his expression sharp and keen as a hawk's.

'Well, Benny, then you look after your mother while I'm gone, and don't let anyone in but the doctor.'

And Marcella turned for an instant towards the bed whereon lay a sick woman too feeble apparently to speak or move.

'I ain't a goin ter,' said the boy shortly, beginning to sweep again with energy 'an' if this ere baby cries, give it the bottle, I spose?'

'No, certainly not,' said Marcella firmly; 'it has just had one. You sweep away, Benny, and let the baby alone.'

Benny looked a trifle wounded, but recovered himself immediately, and ran a general's eye over Marcella, who was just about to leave the room.

'Now look ere, Nuss,' he said in a tone of pitying remonstrance, 'yer never a goin down to that ere coal cellar without a light. Yer'll ave to come runnin up all them stairs again—sure as I'm alive yer will!'

And darting to a cupboard he pulled out a grimy candlestick with an end of dip and some matches, disposed of them at the bottom of the coal-scuttle that Marcella carried over her left arm, and then, still masterfully considering her, let her go.

Marcella groped her way downstairs. The house was one of a type familiar all over the poorer parts of West Central London—the eighteenth-century house inhabited by law or fashion in the days of Dr. Johnson, now parcelled out into insanitary tenements, miserably provided with air, water, and all the necessaries of life, but still showing in its chimney-piece or its decaying staircase signs of the graceful domestic art which had ruled at the building and fitting of it.

Marcella, however, had no eye whatever at the moment for the panelling on the staircase, or the delicate ironwork of the broken balustrade. Rather it seemed to her, as she looked into some of the half-open doors of the swarming rooms she passed, or noticed with disgust the dirt and dilapidation of the stairs, and the evil smells of the basement, that the house added one more to the standing shames of the district—an opinion

doubly strong in her when at last she emerged from her gropings among the dens of the lower regions, and began to toil upstairs again with her filled kettle and coal-scuttle.

The load was heavy, even for her young strength, and she had just passed a sleepless night. The evening before she had been sent for in haste to a woman in desperate illness. She came, and found a young Jewess, with a ten-days-old child beside her, struggling with her husband and two women friends in a state of raging delirium. The room was full to suffocation of loud-tongued, large-eyed Jewesses, all taking turns at holding the patient, and chattering or quarrelling between their turns. It had been Marcella's first and arduous duty to get the place cleared, and she had done it without ever raising her voice or losing her temper for an instant. The noisy pack had been turned out; the most competent woman among them chosen to guard the door and fetch and carry for the nurse; while Marcella set to work to wash her patient and remake the bed as best she could, in the midst of the poor thing's wild shrieks and wrestlings.

It was a task to test both muscular strength and moral force to their utmost. After her year's training Marcella took it simply in the day's work. Some hours of intense effort and strain; then she and the husband looked down upon the patient, a woman of about six-and-twenty, plunged suddenly in narcotic sleep, her matted black hair, which Marcella had not

dared to touch, lying in wild waves on the clean bed-clothes and night-gear that her nurse had extracted from this neighbour and that—she could hardly have told how.

'Ach, mein Gott, mein Gott!' said the husband, rising and shaking himself. He was a Jew from German Poland, and, unlike most of his race, a huge man, with the make and the muscles of a prize-fighter. Yet, after the struggle of the last two hours he was in a bath of perspiration.

'You will have to send her to the infirmary if this comes on again,' said Marcella.

The husband stared in helpless misery, first at his wife, then at the nurse.

'You will not go away, mees,' he implored; 'you will not leaf me alone?'

Wearied as she was, Marcella could have smiled at the abject giant.

'No, I will stay with her till the morning and till the doctor comes. You had better go to bed.'

It was close on three o'clock. The man demurred a little, but he was in truth too worn out to resist. He went into the back room and lay down with the children.

Then Marcella was left through the long summer dawn alone with her patient. Her quick ear caught every sound about her—the heavy breaths of the father and children in the back room, the twittering of the sparrows, the first cries about the streets, the first movements in the crowded house. Her mind all the

time was running partly on contrivances for pulling the woman through—for it was what a nurse calls 'a good case,' one that rouses all her nursing skill and faculty—partly on the extraordinary misconduct of the doctor, to whose criminal neglect and mismanagement of the case she hotly attributed the whole of the woman's illness; and partly—in deep, swift sinkings of meditative thought—on the strangeness of the fact that she should be there at all, sitting in this chair in this miserable room, keeping guard over this Jewish mother and her child!

The year in hospital had *rushed*—dreamless sleep by night, exhausting fatigue of mind and body by day. A hospital nurse, if her work *seizes* her, as it had seized Marcella, never thinks of herself. Now, for some six or seven weeks, she had been living in rooms, as a district nurse, under the control of a central office and superintendent. Her work lay in the homes of the poor, and was of the most varied kind. The life was freer, more elastic; allowed room at last to self-consciousness.

But now the night was over. The husband had gone off to work at a factory near, whence he could be summoned at any moment; the children had been disposed of to Mrs. Levi, the helpful neighbour; she herself had been home for an hour to breakfast and dress, had sent to the office asking that her other cases might be attended to, and was at present in sole charge, with Benny to help her, waiting for the doctor.

When she reached the sick-room again with her burdens, she found Benjamin sitting pensive, with the broom across his knees.

'Well, Benny!' she said as she entered, 'how have you got on?'

'Yer can't move the dirt on them boards with sweepin,' said Benny, looking at them with disgust; 'an' I ain't a goin to try it no more.'

'You're about right there, Benny,' said Marcella mournfully as she inspected them. 'Well, we'll get Mrs. Levi to come in and scrub—as soon as your mother can bear it.'

She stepped up to the bed and looked at her patient, who seemed to be passing into a state of restless prostration, more or less under the influence of morphia. Marcella fed her with strong beef-tea made by herself during the night, and debated whether she should give brandy. No—either the doctor would come directly, or she would send for him. She had not seen him yet, and her lip curled at the thought of him. He had ordered a nurse the night before, but had not stayed to meet her, and Marcella had been obliged to make out his instructions from the husband as best she could.

Benny looked up at her with a wink as she went back to the fire.

'I didn't let none o' *them* in,' he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. 'They come a whisperin at the door, an' a rattlin ov the handle as soon as ever you

gone downstairs. But I tole 'em just to take their-selves off, an' as ow you didn't want 'em. Sillies!'

And taking a crust smeared with treacle out of his pocket, Benny returned with a severe air to the sucking of it.

Marcella laughed.

'Clever Benny,' she said, patting his head; 'but why aren't you at school, sir?'

Benjamin grinned.

'Ow d'yer spose my ma's goin to git along without me to do for 'er and the babby?' he replied slily.

'Well, Benny, you'll have the Board officer down on you.'

At this the urchin laughed out.

'Why, 'e wor here last week! Ee can't be troublin 'isself about this 'ere bloomin street *ev*ery day in the week.'

There was a sharp knock at the door.

'The doctor,' she said, as her face dismissed the frolic brightness which had stolen upon it for a moment. 'Run away, Benny.'

Benny opened the door, looked the doctor coolly up and down, and then withdrew to the landing, where his sisters were waiting to play with him.

The doctor, a tall man of thirty, with a red, blurred face and a fair moustache, walked in hurriedly, and stared at the nurse standing by the fire.

'You come from the St. Martin's Association?'

Marcella stiffly replied. He took her temperature-

chart from her hand and asked her some questions about the night, staring at her from time to time with eyes that displeased her. Presently she came to an account of the condition in which she had found her patient. The edge on the words, for all their professional quiet, was unmistakable. She saw him flush.

He moved towards the bed, and she went with him. The woman moaned as he approached her. He set about his business with hands that shook. Marcella decided at once that he was not sober, and watched his proceedings with increasing disgust and amazement. Presently she could bear it no longer.

'I think,' she said, touching his arm, 'that you had better leave it to me—and—go away!'

He drew himself up with a start which sent the things he held flying, and faced her fiercely.

'What do you mean?' he said. 'Don't you know your place?'

The girl was very white, but her eyes were scornfully steady.

'Yes—I know my place!'

Then with a composure as fearless as it was scathing she said what she had to say. She knew—and he could not deny—that he had endangered his patient's life. She pointed out that he was in a fair way to endanger it again. Every word she said lay absolutely within her sphere as a nurse. His cloudy brain cleared under the stress of it.

Then his eyes flamed, his cheeks became purple, and

Marcella thought for an instant he would have struck her. Finally he turned down his shirt-cuffs and walked away.

'You understand,' he said thickly, turning upon her, with his hat in his hand, 'that I shall not attend this case again till your Association can send me a nurse that will do as she is told without insolence to the doctor. I shall now write a report to your superintendent.'

'As you please,' said Marcella quietly. And she went to the door and opened it.

He passed her sneering.

'A precious superior lot you lady-nurses think yourselves, I dare say. I'd sooner have one old Gamp than the whole boiling of you!'

Marcella eyed him sternly, her nostrils tightening. 'Will you go?' she said.

He gave her a furious glance, and plunged down the stairs outside, breathing threats.

Marcella put her hand to her head a moment, and drew a long breath. There was a certain piteousness in the action, a consciousness of youth and strain.

Then she saw that the landing and the stairs above were beginning to fill with dark-haired Jewesses, eagerly peering and talking. In another minute or two she would be besieged by them. She called sharply, 'Benny!'

Instantly Benny appeared from the landing above, elbowing the Jewesses to right and left.

'What is it you want, Nuss? No, she don't want none o' *you—there!*'

And Benjamin darted into the room, and would have slammed the door in all their faces, but that Marcella said to him—

'Let in Mrs. Levi, please.'

The kind neighbour, who had been taking care of the children, was admitted, and then the key was turned. Marcella scribbled a line on a half-sheet of paper, and, with careful directions, despatched Benny with it.

'I have sent for a new doctor,' she explained, still frowning and white, to Mrs. Levi. 'That one was not fit.'

The woman's olive-skinned face lightened all over. 'Thanks to the Lord!' she said, throwing up her hands. 'But how in the world did you do 't, Miss? There isn't a single soul in this house that doesn't go all of a tremble at the sight of 'im. Yet all the women has 'im when they're ill—bound to. They thinks he must be clever, 'cos he's such a brute. I do believe sometimes it's that. He *is* a brute!'

Marcella was bending over her patient, trying so far as she could to set her straight and comfortable again. But the woman had begun to mutter once more words in a strange dialect that Marcella did not understand, and could no longer be kept still. The temperature was rising again, and another fit of delirium was imminent. Marcella could only hope that she and

Mrs. Levi between them would be able to hold her till the doctor came. When she had done all that was in her power, she sat beside the poor tossing creature, controlling and calming her as best she could, while Mrs. Levi poured into her shrinking ear the story of the woman's illness and of Dr. Blank's conduct of it. Marcella's feeling, as she listened, was made up of that old agony of rage and pity! The sufferings of the poor, *because* they were poor—these things often, still, darkened earth and heaven for her. That wretch would have been quite capable, no doubt, of conducting himself decently and even competently, if he had been called to some supposed lady in one of the well-to-do squares which made the centre of this poor and crowded district.

'Hullo, nurse!' said a cheery voice; 'you seem to have got a bad case.'

The sound was as music in Marcella's ears. The woman she held was fast becoming unmanageable—had just shrieked, first for 'poison,' then for a 'knife,' to kill herself with, and could hardly be prevented, by the combined strength of her nurse and Mrs. Levi, now from throwing herself madly out of bed, and now from tearing out her black hair in handfuls. The doctor—a young Scotchman with spectacles, and stubbly red beard—came quickly up to the bed, asked Marcella a few short questions, shrugged his shoulders over her dry report of Dr. Blank's proceedings, then took out a black case from his pocket, and put his morphia syringe together.

For a long time no result whatever could be obtained by any treatment. The husband was sent for, and came trembling, imploring doctor and nurse, in the intervals of his wife's paroxysms, not to leave him alone.

Marcella, absorbed in the tragic horror of the case, took no note of the passage of time. Everything that the doctor suggested she carried out with a deftness, a tenderness, a power of mind, which keenly affected his professional sense. Once, the poor mother, left unguarded for an instant, struck out with a wild right hand. The blow caught Marcella on the cheek, and she drew back with a slight involuntary cry.

'You are hurt,' said Dr. Angus, running up to her.

'No, no,' she said, smiling through the tears that the shock had called into her eyes, and putting him rather impatiently aside; 'it is nothing. You said you wanted some fresh ice.'

And she went into the back room to get it.

The doctor stood with his hands in his pockets, studying the patient.

'You will have to send her to the infirmary,' he said to the husband; 'there is nothing else for it.'

Marcella came back with the ice, and was able to apply it to the head. The patient was quieter—was, in fact, now groaning herself into a fresh period of exhaustion.

The doctor's sharp eyes took note of the two figures, the huddled creature on the pillows and the stately head bending over her, with the delicately hollowed cheek,

whereon the marks of those mad fingers stood out red and angry. He had already had experience of this girl in one or two other cases.

'Well,' he said, taking up his hat, 'it is no good shilly-shallying. I will go and find Dr. Swift.' Dr. Swift was the parish doctor.

When he had gone, the big husband broke down and cried, with his head against the iron of the bed close to his wife. He put his great hand on hers, and talked to her brokenly in their own patois. They had been eight years married, and she had never had a day's serious illness till now. Marcella's eyes filled with tears as she moved about the room, doing various little tasks.

At last she went up to him.

'Won't you go and have some dinner?' she said to him kindly. 'There's Benjamin calling you,' and she pointed to the door of the back room where stood Benny, his face puckered with weeping, forlornly holding out a plate of fried fish in the hope of attracting his father's attention.

The man, who in spite of his size and strength was in truth childishly soft and ductile, went as he was bid, and Marcella and Mrs. Levi set about doing what they could to prepare the wife for her removal.

Presently parish doctor and sanitary inspector appeared, strange and peremptory invaders who did but add to the terror and misery of the husband. Then at last came the ambulance, and Dr. Angus

with it. The patient, now once more plunged in narcotic stupor, was carried downstairs by two male nurses, Dr. Angus presiding. Marcella stood in the doorway and watched the scene; the gradual disappearance of the helpless form on the stretcher, with its fevered face under the dark mat of hair; the figures of the straining men heavily descending step by step, their heads and shoulders thrown out against the dirty drabs and browns of the staircase; the crowd of Jewesses on the stairs and landing, craning their necks, gesticulating and talking, so that Dr. Angus could hardly make his directions heard, angrily as he bade them stand back; and on the top stair, the big husband, following the form of his departing and unconscious wife with his eyes, his face convulsed with weeping, the whimpering children clinging about his knees.

How hot it was!—how stifling the staircase smelt, and how the sun beat down from that upper window on the towzled unkempt women with their large-eyed children!

CHAPTER IV

MARCELLA on her way home turned into a little street leading to a great block of model dwellings, which rose on the right-hand side and made everything else, the mews entrance opposite, the lines of squalid shops on either side, look particularly small and dirty. The sun was beating fiercely down, and she was sick and tired.

As she entered the iron gate of the dwellings, and saw before her the large asphalted court round which they ran—blazing heat on one side of it, and on the other some children playing cricket against the wall with chalk-marks for wickets—she was seized with depression. The tall yet mean buildings, the smell of dust and heat, the general impression of packed and crowded humanity—these things, instead of offering her rest, only continued and accented the sense of strain, called for more endurance, more making the best of it.

But she found a tired smile for some of the children who ran up to her, and then she climbed the stairs of the E. block, and opened the door of her own tenement, number 10. In number 9 lived Minta Hurd and her

children, who had joined Marcella in London some two months before. In sets 7 and 8, on either side of Marcella and the Hurds, lived two widows, each with a family, who were mostly out charing during the day.

Marcella's Association allowed its District Nurses to live outside the 'home' of the district on certain conditions, which had been fulfilled in Marcella's case by her settlement next door to her old friends in these buildings which were inhabited by a very respectable though poor class. Meanwhile the trustees of the buildings had allowed her to make a temporary communication between her room and the Hurds, so that she could either live her own solitary and independent life, or call for their companionship, as she pleased.

As she shut her door behind her she found herself in a little passage or entry. To the left was her bedroom. Straight in front of her was the living room with a small close range in it, and behind it a little back kitchen.

The living room was cheerful and even pretty. Her art-student's training showed itself. The cheap blue and white paper, the couple of oak flap tables from a broker's shop in Marchmont Street, the two or three cane chairs with their bright chintz cushions, the Indian rug or two on the varnished boards, the photographs and etchings on the walls, the books on the tables—there was not one of these things that was not in its degree a pleasure to her young senses, that did not help

her to live her life. This afternoon, as she opened the door and looked in, the pretty colours and forms in the tiny room were as water to the thirsty. Her mother had sent her some flowers the day before. There they were on the tables, great bunches of honeysuckles, of blue-bells, and Banksia roses. And over the mantelpiece was a photograph of the place where such flowers as Mellor possessed mostly grew—the unkempt lawn, the old fountain and grey walls of the Cedar Garden.

The green blind over the one window which looked into the court had been drawn down against the glare of the sun, as though by a careful hand. Beside a light wooden rocking chair, which was Marcella's favourite seat, a tray of tea-things had been put out. Marcella drew a long breath of comfort as she put down her bag.

'Now, *can* I wait for my tea till I have washed and dressed?'

She argued with herself an instant as though she had been a greedy child; then, going swiftly into the back kitchen, she opened the door between her rooms and the Hurds'.

'Minta!'

A voice responded.

'Minta, make me some tea and boil an egg! there's a good soul! I will be back directly.'

And in ten minutes or so she came back again into the sitting-room, daintily fresh and clean but very pale. She had taken off her nurse's dress and apron, and had

put on something loose and white that hung about her in cool folds.

But Minta Hurd, who had just brought in the tea, looked at her disapprovingly.

'Whatever are you so late for?' she asked a little peevishly. 'You'll get ill if you go missing your dinner.'

'I couldn't help it, Minta, it was such a bad case.'

Mrs. Hurd poured out the tea in silence, unappeased. Her mind was constantly full of protest against this nursing. Why should Miss Boyce do such 'funny things'—why should she live as she did, at all?

Their relation to each other was a curious one. Marcella, knowing that the life of Hurd's widow at Mellor was gall and bitterness, had sent for her at the moment that she herself was leaving the hospital, offering her a weekly sum in return for a little cooking and house service. Minta already possessed a weekly pension, coming from a giver unknown to her. It was regularly handed to her by Mr. Harden, and she could only imagine that one of the 'gentlemen' who had belonged to the Hurd Reprieve Committee, and had worked so hard for Jim, was responsible for it, out of pity for her and her children. The payment offered her by Miss Boyce would defray the expense of London house-rent, the children's schooling, and leave a trifle over. Moreover she was pining to get away from Mellor. Her first instinct after her husband's execution

had been to hide herself from all the world. But for a long time her precarious state of health, and her dependence first on Marcella, then on Mary Harden, made it impossible for her to leave the village. It was not till Marcella's proposal came that her way was clear. She sold her bits of things at once, took her children, and went up to Brown's Buildings.

Marcella met her with the tenderness, the tragic tremor of feeling from which the peasant's wife shrank anew, bewildered, as she had often shrunk from it in the past. Jim's fate had made her an old woman at thirty-two. She was now a little shrivelled consumptive creature with almost white hair, and a face from which youth had gone, unless perhaps there were some traces of it in the still charming eyes, and small open mouth. But these changes had come upon her she knew not why, as the result of blows she felt but had never reasoned about. Marcella's fixed mode of conceiving her and her story caused her from the beginning of their fresh acquaintance a dumb irritation and trouble she could never have explained. It was so tragic, reflective, exacting. It seemed to ask of her feelings that she could not have, to expect from her expression that was impossible. And it stood also between her and the friends and distractions that she would like to have. Why shouldn't that queer man, Mr. Strozzi, who lived down below, and whose name she could not pronounce, come and sit sometimes of an evening, and amuse her and the children? He was a 'Professor of

Elocution' and said and sung comic pieces. He was very civil and obliging too; she liked him. Yet Miss Boyce was evidently astonished that she could make friends with him, and Minta perfectly understood the lift of her dark eyebrows whenever she came in and found him sitting there.

Meanwhile Marcella had expected her with emotion, and had meant through this experiment to bring herself truly near to the poor. Minta must not call her Miss Boyce, but by her name; which, however, Minta, reddening, had declared she could never do. Her relation to Marcella was not to be that of servant in any sense, but of friend and sister; and on her and her children Marcella had spent from the beginning a number of new womanish wiles which, strangely enough, this hard, strenuous life had been developing in her. She would come and help put the children to bed; she would romp with them in their night-gowns; she would bend her imperious head over the anxious endeavour to hem a pink cotton pinafore for Daisy, or dress a doll for the baby. But the relation jarred and limped perpetually, and Marcella wistfully thought it her fault.

Just now, however, as she sat gently swaying backwards and forwards in the rocking-chair, enjoying her tea, her mood was one of nothing but content.

'Oh, Minta, give me another cup. I want to have a sleep so badly, and then I am going to see Miss Hallin, and stay to supper with them.'

'Well, you mustn't go out in them nursin things

again,' said Minta quickly; 'I've put you in some lace in your black dress, an' it looks beautiful.'

'Oh, thank you, Minta; but that black dress always seems to me too smart to walk about these streets in.'

'It's just *nice*,' said Minta with decision. 'It's just what everybody that knows you—what your mamma—would like to see you in. I can't abide them nursin clothes—nasty things!'

'I declare!' cried Marcella, laughing, but outraged; 'I never like myself so well in anything.'

Minta was silent, but her small mouth took an obstinate look. What she really felt was that it was absurd for ladies to wear caps and aprons and plain black bonnets, when there was no need for them to do anything of the kind.

'Whatever have you been doing to your cheek?' she exclaimed suddenly, as Marcella handed her the empty cup to take away.

Marcella explained shortly, and Minta looked more discontented than ever. 'A lot of low people as ought to look after themselves,' that was how in her inmost mind she generally defined Marcella's patients. She had been often kind and soft to her neighbours at Mellor, but these dirty, crowded Londoners were another matter.

'Where is Daisy?' asked Marcella as Minta was going away with the tea; 'she must have come back from school.'

'Here I am,' said Daisy with a grin, peeping in

through the door of the back kitchen. 'Mother, baby's woke up.'

'Come here, you monkey,' said Marcella; 'come and go to sleep with me. Have you had your tea?'

'Yes, lots,' said Daisy, climbing up into Marcella's lap. 'Are you going to be asleep a long time?'

'No—only a nap. Oh! Daisy, I'm so tired. Come and cuddlie a bit! If you don't go to sleep you know you can slip away—I shan't wake.'

The child, a slight, red-haired thing, with something of the ethereal charm that her dead brother had possessed, settled herself on Marcella's knees, slipped her left thumb into her mouth, and flung her other arm round Marcella's neck. They had often gone to sleep so. Mrs. Hurd came back, drew down the blind further, threw a light shawl over them both, and left them.

An hour and a half later Minta came in again as she had been told. Daisy had slipped away, but Marcella was still lying in the perfect gentleness and relaxation of sleep.

'You said I was to come and wake you,' said Minta, drawing up the blind; 'but I don't believe you're a bit fit to be going about. Here's some hot water, and there's a letter just come.'

Marcella woke with a start, Minta put the letter on her knee, and dream and reality flowed together as she saw her own name in Wharton's handwriting.

She read the letter, then sat flushed and thinking for a while with her hands on her knees.

A little while later she opened the Hurds' front door.

'Minta, I am going now. I shall be back early after supper, for I haven't written my report.'

'There—now you look something like!' said Minta, scanning her approvingly—the wide hat and pretty black dress. 'Shall Daisy run out with that telegram?'

'No, thanks. I shall pass the post. Good-bye.'

And she stooped and kissed the little withered woman. She wished, ardently wished, that Minta would be more truly friends with her!

After a brisk walk through the June evening she stopped—still within the same district—at the door of a house in a long, old-fashioned street, wherein the builder was busy on either hand, since most of the long leases had just fallen in. But the house she entered was still untouched. She climbed a last-century staircase, adorned with panels of stucco work—slender Italianate reliefs of wreaths, ribbons, and medallions on a pale green ground. The decoration was clean and cared for, the house in good order. Eighty years ago it was the home of a famous judge, who entertained in its rooms the legal and literary celebrities of his day. Now it was let out to professional people in lodgings or unfurnished rooms. Edward Hallin and his sister occupied the top floor.

Miss Hallin, a pleasant-looking, plain woman of

about thirty-five, came at once in answer to Marcella's knock, and greeted her affectionately. Edward Hallin sprang up from a table at the further end of the room.

'You are so late! Alice and I had made up our minds you had forgotten us!'

'I didn't get home till four, and then I had to have a sleep,' she explained, half shyly.

'What! you haven't been night-nursing?'

'Yes, for once.'

'Alice, tell them to bring up supper, and let's look after her.'

He wheeled round a comfortable chair to the open window—the charming circular bow of last-century design, which filled up the end of the room and gave it character. The window looked out on a quiet line of back gardens, such as may still be seen in Bloomsbury, with fine plane trees here and there just coming into full leaf; and beyond them the backs of another line of houses in a distant square, with pleasant irregularities of old brickwork and tiled roof. The mottled trunks of the planes, their blackened twigs and branches, their thin, beautiful leaves, the forms of the houses beyond, rose in a charming medley of line against the blue and peaceful sky. No near sound was to be heard, only the distant murmur that no Londoner escapes; and some of the British Museum pigeons were sunning themselves on the garden-wall below.

Within, the Hallins' room was spacious and barely furnished. The walls, indeed, were crowded with books,

and broken, where the books ceased, by photographs of Italy and Greece; but of furniture proper there seemed to be little beside Hallin's large writing-table facing the window, and a few chairs, placed on the blue drugget which brother and sister had chosen with a certain anxiety, dreading secretly lest it should be a piece of self-indulgence to buy what pleased them both so much. On one side of the fireplace was Miss Hallin's particular corner; her chair, the table that held her few special books, her work-basket, with its knitting, her accounts. There, in the intervals of many activities, she sat and worked or read, always cheerful and busy, and always watching over her brother.

'I wish,' said Hallin, with some discontent, when Marcella had settled herself, 'that we were going to be alone to-night; that would have rested you more.'

'Why, who is coming?' said Marcella, a little flatly. She had certainly hoped to find them alone.

'Your old friend, Frank Leven, is coming to supper. When he heard you were to be here he vowed that nothing could or should keep him away. Then, after supper, one or two people asked if they might come in. There are some anxious things going on.'

He leant his head on his hand for a moment with a sigh, then forcibly wrenched himself from what were evidently recurrent thoughts.

'Do tell me some more of what you are doing!' he said, bending forward to her. 'You don't know how

much I have thought of what you have told me already.'

'I'm doing just the same,' she said, laughing. 'Don't take so much interest in it. It's the fashion just now to admire nurses; but it's ridiculous. We do our work like other people—sometimes badly, sometimes well. And some of us wouldn't do it if we could help it.'

She threw out the last words with a certain vehemence, as though eager to get away from any sentimentalism about herself. Hallin studied her kindly.

'Is this miscellaneous work a relief to you after hospital?' he asked.

'For the present. It is more exciting, and one sees more character. But there are drawbacks. In hospital everything was settled for you—every hour was full, and there were always orders to follow. And the "off" times were no trouble—I never did anything else but walk up and down the Embankment if it was fine, or go to the National Gallery if it was wet.'

'And it was the monotony you liked?'

She made a sign of assent.

'Strange!' said Hallin. 'Who could ever have foreseen it?'

She flushed.

'You might have foreseen it, I think,' she said, not without a little impatience. 'But I didn't like it all at once. I hated a great deal of it. If they had let me alone all the time to scrub and polish and wash—the

things they set me to at first—I thought I should have been quite happy. To see my table full of glasses without a spot, and my brass-taps shining, made me as proud as a peacock! But then of course I had to learn the real work, and that was very odd at first.'

'How? Morally?'

She nodded, laughing at her own remembrances. 'Yes—it seemed to me all topsy-turvy. I thought the Sister at the head of the ward rather a stupid person. If I had seen her at Mellor I shouldn't have spoken two words to her. And here she was ordering me about—rating me as I had never rated a housemaid—laughing at me for not knowing this or that, and generally making me feel that a raw probationer was one of the things of least account in the whole universe. I knew perfectly well that she had said to herself, "Now then I must take that proud girl down a peg, or she will be no use to anybody;" and I had somehow to put up with it.'

'Drastic!' said Hallin, laughing; 'did you comfort yourself by reflecting that it was everybody's fate?'

Her lip twitched with amusement.

'Not for a long time. I used to have the most absurd ideas!—sometimes looking back I can hardly believe it—perhaps it was partly a queer state of nerves. When I was at school and got in a passion I used to try and overawe the girls by shaking my Speaker great-uncle in their faces. And so in hospital; it would flash across me sometimes in a plaintive sort of way that they

couldn't know that I was Miss Boyce of Mellor, and had been mothering and ruling the whole of my father's village—or they wouldn't treat me so. Mercifully I held my tongue. But one day it came to a crisis. I had had to get things ready for an operation, and had done very well. Dr. Marshall had paid me even a little compliment all to myself. But then afterwards the patient was some time in coming to, and there had to be hot-water bottles. I had them ready of course; but they were too hot, and in my zeal and nervousness I burnt the patient's elbow in two places. Oh! the *fuss*, and the scolding, and the humiliation! When I left the ward that evening I thought I would go home next day.'

'But you didn't?'

'If I could have sat down and thought it out, I should probably have gone. But I couldn't think it out—I was too *dead* tired. That is the chief feature of your first months in hospital—the utter helpless fatigue at night. You go to bed aching and you wake up aching. If you are healthy as I was, it doesn't hurt you; but, when your time comes to sleep, sleep you *must*. Even that miserable night my head was no sooner on the pillow than I was asleep; and next morning there was all the routine as usual, and the dread of being a minute late on duty. Then when I got into the ward the Sister looked at me rather queerly and went out of her way to be kind to me. Oh! I was so grateful to her! I could have brushed her boots or done any other menial

service for her with delight. And—then—somehow I pulled through. The enormous interest of the work seized me—I grew ambitious—they pushed me on rapidly—everybody seemed suddenly to become my friend instead of my enemy—and I ended by thinking the hospital the most fascinating and engrossing place in the whole world.'

'A curious experience,' said Hallin. 'I suppose you had never obeyed anyone in your life before?'

'Not since I was at school—and then—not much!'

Hallin glanced at her as she lay back in her chair. How richly human the face had grown! It was as forcible as ever in expression and colour, but that look which had often repelled him in his first acquaintance with her, as of a hard speculative eagerness more like the ardent boy than the woman, had very much disappeared. It seemed to him absorbed in something new—something sad and yet benignant, informed with all the pathos and the pain of growth.

'How long have you been at work to-day?' he asked her.

'I went at eleven last night. I came away at four this afternoon.'

Hallin exclaimed, 'You had food?'

'Do you think I should let myself starve with my work to do?' she asked him, with a shade of scorn and her most professional air. 'And don't suppose that such a case occurs often. It is a very rare thing for us to undertake night-nursing at all.'

'Can you tell me what the case was?'

She told him vaguely, describing also in a few words her encounter with Dr. Blank.

'I suppose he will make a fuss,' she said, with a restless look, 'and that I shall be blamed.'

'I should think your second doctor will take care of that!' said Hallin.

'I don't know. I couldn't help it. But it is one of our first principles not to question a doctor. And last week too I got the Association into trouble. A patient I had been nursing for weeks and got quite fond of had to be removed to hospital. She asked me to cut her hair. It was matted dreadfully, and would have been cut off directly she got to the ward. So I cut it, left her all comfortable, and was to come back at one to meet the doctor and help get her off. When I came, I found the whole court in an uproar. The sister of the woman, who had been watching for me, stood on the doorstep, and implored me to go away. The husband had gone out of his senses with rage because I had cut his wife's hair without his consent. "He'll murder you, Nuss!" said the sister, "if he sees you! Don't come in!—he's mad—he's *been going round on 'is 'ands and knees on the floor!*"'

Hallin interrupted with a shout of laughter. Marcella laughed too; but to his amazement he saw that her hand shook, and that there were tears in her eyes.

'It's all very well,' she said with a sigh, 'but I had to come away in disgrace, all the street looking on. And he made such a fuss at the office as never

was. It was unfortunate — we don't want the people set against the nurses. And now Dr. Blank! —I seem to be always getting into scrapes. It is different from hospital, where everything is settled for one.'

Hallin could hardly believe his ears. Such womanish terrors and depressions from Marcella Boyce! Was she, after all, too young for the work, or was there some fret of the soul reducing her natural force? He felt an unwonted impulse of tenderness towards her—such as one might feel towards a tired child—and set himself to cheer and rest her.

He had succeeded to some extent, when he saw her give a little start, and following her eyes he perceived that unconsciously his arm, which was resting on the table, had pushed into her view a photograph in a little frame, which had been hitherto concealed from her by a glass of flowers. He would have quietly put it out of sight again, but she sat up in her chair.

'Will you give it me?' she said, putting out her hand.

He gave it her at once.

'Alice brought it home from Miss Raeburn the other day. His aunt made him sit to one of the photographers who are always besieging public men. We thought it good.'

'It is very good,' she said, after a pause. 'Is the hair really—as grey as that?' She pointed to it.

'Quite. I am very glad that he is going off with

Lord Maxwell to Italy. It will be ten days' break for him at any rate. His work this last year has been very heavy. He has had his grandfather's to do really, as well as his own; and this Commission has been a stiff job too. I am rather sorry that he has taken this new post.'

'What post?'

'Didn't you hear? They have made him Under-Secretary to the Home Department. So that he is now in the Government.'

She put back the photograph, and moved her chair a little so as to see more of the plane trees and the strips of sunset cloud.

'How is Lord Maxwell?' she asked presently.

'Much changed. It might end in a sudden break-up at any time.'

Hallin saw a slight contraction pass over her face. He knew that she had always felt an affection for Lord Maxwell. Suddenly Marcella looked hastily round her. Miss Hallin was busy with a little servant at the other end of the room making arrangements for supper.

'Tell me,' she said, bending over the arm of her chair and speaking in a low, eager voice, 'he is beginning to forget it?'

Hallin looked at her in silence, but his half sad, half ironic smile suggested an answer from which she turned away.

'If he only would!' she said, speaking almost to

herself, with a kind of impatience. 'He ought to marry, for everybody's sake.'

'I see no sign of his marrying—at present,' said Hallin drily.

He began to put some papers under his hand in order. There was a cold dignity in his manner which she perfectly understood. Ever since that day—that never-forgotten day—when he had come to her the morning after her last interview with Aldous Raeburn—come with reluctance and dislike, because Aldous had asked it of him—and had gone away her friend, more drawn to her, more touched by her than he had ever been in the days of the engagement, their relation on this subject had been the same. His sweetness and kindness to her, his influence over her life during the past eighteen months, had been very great. In that first interview, the object of which had been to convey to her a warning on the subject of the man it was thought she might allow herself to marry, something in the manner with which he had attempted his incredibly difficult task—its simplicity, its delicate respect for her personality, its suggestion of a character richer and saintlier than anything she had yet known, and unconsciously revealing itself under the stress of emotion—this something had suddenly broken down his pale, proud companion, had to his own great dismay brought her to tears, and to such confidences, such indirect askings for help and understanding as amazed them both.

Experiences of this kind were not new to him. His life consecrated to ideas, devoted to the wresting of the maximum of human service from a crippling physical weakness; the precarious health itself which cut him off from a hundred ordinary amusements and occupations, and especially cut him off from marriage—together with the ardent temperament, the charm, the imaginative insight which had been his cradle-gifts—these things ever since he was a lad had made him again and again the guide and prop of natures stronger and stormier than his own. Often the unwilling guide; for he had the half-impatient, breathless instincts of the man who has set himself a task, and painfully doubts whether he will have power and time to finish it. The claims made upon him seemed to him often to cost him physical and brain energy he could ill spare.

But his quick tremulous sympathy rendered him really a defenceless prey in such matters. Marcella threw herself upon him as others had done; and there was no help for it. Since their first memorable interview, at long intervals, he had written to her and she to him. Of her hospital life, till to-night, she had never told him much. Her letters had been the passionate outpourings of a nature sick of itself, and for the moment of living; full of explanations which really explained little; full too of the untaught pangs and questionings of a mind which had never given any sustained or exhaustive effort to any philosophical or social question,

and yet was in a sense tortured by them all—athirst for an impossible justice, and aflame for ideals mocked first and above all by the writer's own weakness and defect. Hallin had felt them interesting, sad, and, in a sense, fine; but he had never braced himself to answer them without groans. There were so many other people in the world in the same plight!

Nevertheless, all through the growth of friendship one thing had never altered between them from the beginning—Hallin's irrevocable judgment of the treatment she had bestowed on Aldous Raeburn. Never throughout the whole course of their acquaintance had he expressed that judgment to her in so many words. Notwithstanding, she knew perfectly well both the nature and the force of it. It lay like a rock in the stream of their friendship. The currents of talk might circle round it, imply it, glance off from it; they left it unchanged. At the root of his mind towards her, at the bottom of his gentle sensitive nature, there was a sternness which he often forgot—she never.

This hard fact in their relation had insensibly influenced her greatly, was constantly indeed working in and upon her, especially since the chances of her nursing career had brought her to settle in this district, within a stone's throw of him and his sister, so that she saw them often and intimately. But it worked in different ways. Sometimes—as to-night—it evoked a kind of defiance.

A minute or two after he had made his remark about Aldous, she said to him suddenly,

'I had a letter from Mr. Wharton to-day. He is coming to tea with me to-morrow, and I shall probably go to the House on Friday with Edith Craven to hear him speak.'

Hallin gave a slight start at the name. Then he said nothing; but went on sorting some letters of the day into different heaps. His silence roused her irritation.

'Do you remember,' she said in a low, energetic voice, 'that I told you I could never be ungrateful, never forget what he had done?'

'Yes, I remember,' he said, not without a certain sharpness of tone. 'You spoke of giving him help if he ever asked it of you—has he asked it?'

She explained that what he seemed to be asking was Louis Craven's help, and that his overtures with regard to the *Labour Clarion* were particularly opportune, seeing that Louis was pining to be able to marry, and was losing heart, hope, and health for want of some fixed employment. She spoke warmly of her friends and their troubles, and Hallin's inward distaste had to admit that all she said was plausible. Since the moment in that strange talk which had drawn them together, when she had turned upon him with the passionate cry—'I see what you mean, perfectly! but I am not going to marry Mr. Wharton, so don't trouble to warn me—for the matter of that he has warned me

himself:—but my *gratitude* he *has* earned, and if he asks for it I will *never* deny it him'—since that moment there had been no word of Wharton between them. At the bottom of his heart Hallin distrusted her, and was ashamed of himself because of it. His soreness and jealousy for his friend knew no bounds. 'If that were to come on again'—he was saying to himself now, as she talked to him—'I could not bear it, I could not forgive her!'

He only wished that she would give up talking about Wharton altogether. But, on the contrary, she would talk of him—and with a curious persistence. She must needs know what Hallin thought of his career in Parliament, of his prospects, of his powers as a speaker. Hallin answered shortly, like someone approached on a subject for which he cares nothing.

'Yet, of course, it is not that; it is injustice!' she said to herself, with vehemence. 'He *must* care; they are his subjects, his interests too. But he will not look at it dispassionately, because——'

So they fell out with each other a little, and the talk dragged. Yet, all the while, Marcella's inner mind was conscious of quite different thoughts. How good it was to be here, in this room, beside these two people! She must show herself fractious and difficult with Hallin sometimes; it was her nature. But in reality, that slight and fragile form, that spiritual presence were now shrined in the girl's eager reverence and affection. She felt towards him as many a Catholic

has felt towards his director; though the hidden yearning to be led by him was often oddly covered, as now, by an outer self-assertion. Perhaps her quarrel with him was that he would not lead her enough—would not tell her precisely enough what she was to do with herself.

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